

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



**March 2013**

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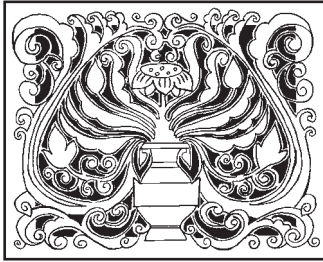


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Vol. 118, No. 3  
March 2013



Amrita Kalasha

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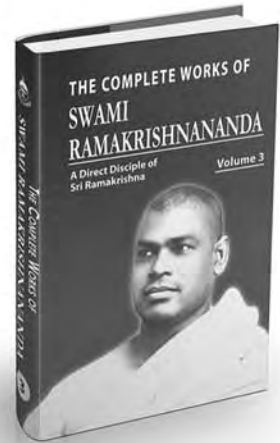
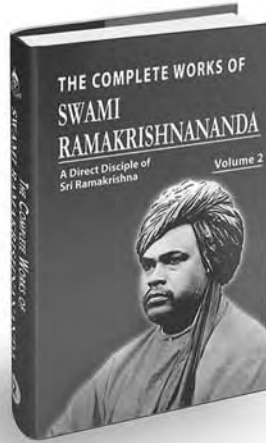
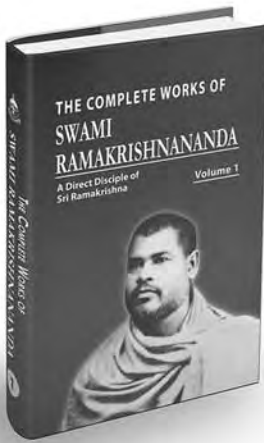
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**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## Where the Mind Ends

March 2013  
Vol. 118, No. 3

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।  
स दाधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतेमां कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥

In the beginning rose Hiranyagarbha, born only Lord of all created beings.  
He fixed and held up this earth and heaven. What God shall we adore with  
our oblation?

(Rig Veda, 10.121.1)

यस्मिन्नुचः साम यजूंषि यस्मिन्प्रतिष्ठिता रथनाभाविवाराः ।  
यस्मिंश्चित्तु सर्वमोतं प्रजानां तन्मे मनः शिवसंकल्पमस्तु ॥

May that mind of mine, in which the Riks, Samans, and Yajur verses are set  
up like the spokes in the nave of a wheel and in which all knowledge of living  
beings is woven, be of auspicious resolution.

(Yajur Veda, 34.5)

यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते । अप्राप्य मनसा सह ।  
आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वान् । न बिभेति कुतश्चनेति ॥

The enlightened one is not afraid of anything after realizing that bliss of  
Brahman, failing to reach which words turn back along with the mind.

(Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.9.1)

परि द्यावापृथिवी यन्ति सद्यः परि लोकन् परि दिशः परि सुवः ।  
ऋतस्य तन्तुं विततं विचृत्य तदपश्यत् प्रजासु ॥

They (who realize their identity with Brahman) immediately spread over  
heaven and earth. They pervade other worlds, the quarters of heaven, and the  
region called Suvarloka. Whosoever among created beings sees that Brahman  
named Rita, the True, pervading the creation like the thread of a cloth, by  
contemplation in mind, truly become That.

(Mahanarayana Upanishad, 1.17)

# THIS MONTH

Humankind as a species is evolving on the physical and mental levels, but the rate of evolution is faster in the latter. The **Evolution of the Mind** is leading humanity towards its spiritual dimension.

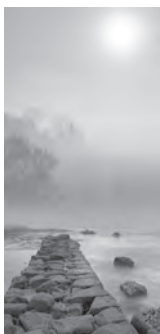
The more one understands Sri Ramakrishna, the more one loves him, while his profound ideas and personality settle in the subconscious. Swami Sandarshanananda of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, writes on **Understanding Sri Ramakrishna**.



**Vivekananda's Vision of Women** explores how Swamiji's ideas are applicable to contemporary women facing the diverse challenges of a changing world. The author, Dr R J Kalpana, is a management consultant and poet from Chennai.

**Seeking Success** is the speech delivered at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, New Delhi, by Abhinav Bindra, Olympic and World Champion, on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda on 12 January 2013.

There is high individual and social value in self-control. It integrates the mind and the body, releases creativity, and reduces crime. Swami Tathagatananda, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, writes on **The Value of Brahmacharya**.



The unborn girl child has been the focal point of all that is dark in human nature. Dr Merina Islam, Assistant Professor, Cachar College, Assam, writes on **Death before Birth: A Curse of Modern Technology**.

In the second part of **Vivekananda's Impact on the World of Ideas** Dr Satish K Kapoor, Ex-British Council scholar and registrar of Dayananda Anglo Vedic University, Jalandhar, shows how Swamiji was a pioneer in spreading Vedanta and yoga to the West.

In the sixth part of **Eternal Words**, Swami Adbhutananda speaks on selfless love, gratitude, and egoism, and shows the pitfalls in spiritual life. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published by Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.

The eleventh instalment of **Svarajya Siddhi: Attaining Self-dominion**, by the eighteenth century Gangadharendra Saraswati, fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, explains the differing views of various philosophical schools regarding the Reality.

# *Evolution of the Mind*

**H**UMANKIND AS A SPECIES is qualified and defined by the mind. The mind is versatile and capable of doing many things, including what seems to be impossible. But one discovers that the quality of the mind ranges from that of a genius to that of an idiot. What makes minds different is the same thing that makes bodies different. No two bodies and minds are similar. This implies that bodies and minds have a common origin. This much is understood and accepted today. In the past some religions identified the mind with the spirit, and this is still causing confusion. Plurality and diversity is the law of nature. This fact is also accepted, for it answers to a point many questions regarding vast differences among people. But deep down within the individual this explanation leaves a few important questions unanswered. Therefore, we come to another theory to complete the vast internal and external panorama of the universe: the law of karma. Firstly, with this law we are no longer puppets in the hands of nature but have a great degree of control over our lives. Secondly, neither God nor nature can be blamed for our misfortune or fate. Thirdly, people derived the basis of morality and ethics from some divine commands—the law of karma perfectly explains ethics and morality without resorting to Bronze Age beliefs. We reap what we sow; every action has an opposite and equal reaction. Karma is a powerful force that sculpts bodies, brains, minds, societies, nature—everything. What we do, think, or say leaves its mark on the mind, and that is the software that runs our minds.

Nature, through evolution, gives all beings the basic hardware materials—bodies designed by genetic codes. One wonders why some people are antagonistic and fight against the theory of evolution, which is an indisputable law of nature. But what most people are not aware of is that the same law applies to the mind. No mind is static; it keeps evolving. Does anyone dispute that one's mind has not advanced every single day of one's life? Some wise people all over the world had the inkling that mental evolution does not stop at death. In Hinduism this belief was made the main pillar of dharma. Moreover, Indian religions showed how the mind can be trained and made to evolve further till it reaches its glorious culmination. This science is called yoga. The cause of mental evolution is knowledge and love. The mind imbued with knowledge and love, which really are not different, realizes the highest Reality.

However, in spite of a wide variation of minds found among humans, almost the whole of today's mental spectrum is operating at the rudimentary or undeveloped stages of the mind. Once while going to see a circus in Calcutta Sri Ramakrishna, like a joyous child, leaned first out of one side of the carriage and then out of the other. He then remarked to a devotee: 'I find the attention of the people fixed on earthly things. They are all rushing about for the sake of their stomachs. No one is thinking of God.' 'Where does the mind of a man ordinarily dwell? In the first three planes. These are at the organ of evacuation and generation, and at the navel.' This is the mind given purely for physical survival and attached to worldliness.


We may talk of being civilized and so on, but one scratch, as Swami Vivekananda says, brings out the savage in us. Savagery, brutality, cunningness, untruthfulness lurk just below the thin veneer of sophistication and civil behaviour. This savagery helped us as a species to survive and evolve through millions of years. And though for almost the last ten thousand years this savagery has become redundant, we still cling to it. That ancient savagery has taken newer and newer forms in modern societies and is appearing as anger, jealousy, hatred, deception, hypocrisy, and other evils. As minds are graded, these new forms of savagery are found in different degrees of operation.

On the one hand, the world today appears horrible and wicked, stuck on the lowest rungs of mental evolution; humanity seems bent on destroying itself and the environment. On the other hand, people are healthier, educated, cleaner, connected, more aware, and more intelligent—even the last century, which was a violent one due to the world wars and other genocides, shows that humans have killed each other less often than in past centuries and ages.

Swamiji says: ‘When a kettle of water is coming to the boil, if you watch the phenomenon, you find first one bubble rising, and then another and so on, until at last they all join, and a tremendous commotion takes place. This world is very similar. Each individual is like a bubble, and the nations, resemble many bubbles.’ There is a great movement towards escaping from the lower to the higher levels. When this movement is seen in the wrong perspective, individuals and societies appear confused and disordered. What is this process or force or movement that is pushing humanity upwards? It is the evolution of the mind. Whatever one might say, there has never been so much religion and spirituality in the world as in the present time. Of course, the danger of fanaticism is also there, but one does not have to throw

the baby out with the bathwater. The urge for religion is natural to humans, and this is what evolves the mind. Wherever there are humans, there is religion in some form or other, ranging from organized structures to the search for higher truths and light in science, philosophy, or plain morality. There is a vague intuition that beckons humans to actualize a higher dimension of existence. Humanity has slowly woken up to this idea of mind evolution and is ascending higher.

Why was this evolution of the mind dormant for thousands of years? The Hindu scriptures on yoga say that the kundalini, which lies dormant, needs awakening. It may take years of hard ascetic self-discipline to awaken the kundalini. For this reason yoga was not able to become the general means by which to raise humanity as a whole. But things were about to change: the spiritual history of humanity or evolution of the mind was going to be redefined. This new impetus needed an avatara, not individual yogis however great or numerous. ‘Swami Vivekananda once said: “In this age the *Brahma-kundalini*—the Mother who is responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe—has been awakened by the fervent prayers of Sri Ramakrishna.” No wonder the individual kundalini will be awakened now!’ This was told by Swami Shivananda, one of Sri Ramakrishna’s disciples.

Sri Ramakrishna was identified with the cosmic mind, and he worked on it. That is how he could awaken the *brahma-kundalini*. He was thrice commanded by the Divine Mother to dwell in *bhavamukha*, a state in which the universal mind becomes one’s own. She did not want him to merge in the absolute Brahman but awaken the human consciousness through the process of the evolution of the mind. And indeed, it was Swami Vivekananda who was responsible for the upsurge of yoga and spirituality the world over, because he travelled and preached it widely. 

# Understanding Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Sandarshananda

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S wonderful life many a times defies easy understanding. But to summarily deny the events and incidents that baffle us is of course not a solution. His lila was so real that those who witnessed it bore indelible impressions that became testimonies for them and for others. One might therefore presume that although he appeared like an ordinary person, Sri Ramakrishna's life is beyond human or normal comprehension.

Sri Ramakrishna said that God, or even an avatara, cannot be known exhaustively. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita: 'O Arjuna, I know the past and the present as also the future beings; but no one knows Me!'<sup>1</sup> In Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime many spiritually enlightened souls convincingly declared him to be an avatara. They also declared that to know Sri Ramakrishna in his true nature was an impossible proposition. Swami Ramakrishnananda, one of his apostles, said: 'You people call Master an avatar, or divine incarnation. Do you have any idea of what an avatar is? ... Swami Vivekananda and all his lectures and writings plus all the disciples of the Master and their works plus the infinite—are equal to Sri Ramakrishna.'<sup>2</sup>

## A Paradox

There are, nevertheless, certain things in Sri Ramakrishna that attract much attention. For example, he was outwardly a householder and inwardly a real sannyasin, which is extraordinary. The ideals of the sannyasin and of the householder are poles apart. There is an inevitable incompatibility between the two, making their

coexistence absurd—the former demanding attachment and the latter complete detachment. Astonishingly, Sri Ramakrishna changed such an absurdity into a reality in his life.

From this perspective Sri Ramakrishna's life is a paradox. Having been formally married and later formally initiated into sannyasa, he applied renunciation dexterously for the consummation of both the paths. He showed that irrespective of being a householder or a sannyasin renunciation is a *sine qua non* for the accomplishment of liberation from samsara. He is not exclusively recognizable either as a householder or as a sannyasin, as both the natures in their ideal forms were simultaneously available in his personality. To accept him as the one to the exclusion of the other is a mistake—he lent a celestial beauty to each. Sri Ramakrishna is similar to Shiva, who is an ideal spouse as well as a perfect sannyasin.

Sri Ramakrishna showed by his marriage and the way he conducted it that married life has a divine purpose. He was a *jivanmukta*, liberated soul, obviously desireless, yet he lived in the world. He 'repeatedly stated that householders need not practise external renunciation; it is enough if they maintain the spirit of renunciation in their minds and do their duties without attachment or delusion.'<sup>3</sup> Opposites and contradictions blend in Sri Ramakrishna without creating any problems, and he is also a comfortable refuge to all affirmations and negations. Sri Ramakrishna is 'subtler than the subtle and greater than the great'.<sup>4</sup>

To householders Sri Ramakrishna teaches that family life is not an insurmountable barrier

to spirituality, provided one does not get stuck with the world through its attachments and falsifications and therefore become a hypocrite. Swami Vivekananda gives a reflection of what occurs when a householder goes out of the track and flaunts false wisdom under the influence of maya:

On the one side, therefore, is the bold assertion that this is all nonsense, that this is Maya, but along with it, there is the most hopeful assertion that beyond Maya, there is a way out. On the other hand, practical men tell us, 'Don't bother your heads about such nonsense as religion and metaphysics. Live here; this is a very bad world indeed, but make the best of it.' Which put in plain language means, live a hypocritical, lying life, a life of continuous fraud, covering all sores in the best way you can. Go on putting patch after patch, until everything is lost, and you are a mass of patchwork. This is what is called practical life. Those that are satisfied with this patchwork will never come to religion.<sup>5</sup>

All through his teachings Sri Ramakrishna compassionately shows the pitfalls of samsara and the way out of its grip. His cardinal advice to householders is to outgrow samsara through spiritual evolution, which is also the teaching of the Gita.

The fact that Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother had a perfect spiritual relationship—they were made of the same stuff—can be seen from the impeccable guru Sri Sarada Devi became after Sri Ramakrishna's *mahasamadhi*. Numerous disciples and people noticed that she had no regrets for not being able to raise a family like other married women. Instead, she expressed that her heart was full of joy and satisfaction for having such a godlike husband. That she accepted her husband as guru and considered his tutelage the be-all and end-all of her life is exemplary.

There was constant love and faith between them. To understand such a relationship one has to break the preconceived ideas regarding marriage and be free from lust. Swamiji speaks about the Holy Mother thus: 'The maiden was a pure and noble soul, and was able to understand her husband's aspirations and sympathise with them. She quickly told him that she had no wish to drag him down to a life of worldliness; but that all she desired was to remain near him, to serve him, and to learn of him. She became one of his most devoted disciples, always revering him as a divine being' (4.173).

She knew that the infinite spiritual resources Sri Ramakrishna had at his disposal were capable of awakening the universal motherhood in her, which she would manifest in due course to become mother to children of various nationalities, religions, classes, and races. Eventually, as she desired, Sri Ramakrishna's guidance made her extremely sweet, serene, wise, and the 'mother of all'. Seeing her Sri Ramakrishna could not but hold her wisdom and power in the highest esteem. He once told Golap Ma: 'She (Mother) is Sarada, Saraswati; she has come to impart knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest unregenerate people should come to grief by looking at her with impure eyes.'<sup>6</sup>

### **A Subject of Study**

Sri Ramakrishna is increasingly becoming an interesting subject of study for social scientists. Though he was of the world, he was not passionate about it. This is why he cannot be measured by any worldly parameters. In spite of his indifference to material possessions, Sri Ramakrishna understood the importance of basic human amenities and needs. Moreover, he was particular about the equitable distribution of wealth. This makes him enigmatic, for one usually takes

him to be too naive and indifferent to worldly affairs. One, however, finds him to be also a socialist per se in behaviour as he had a natural tendency towards sameness, even in the realm of secular activities. He wanted to see the socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor diminished. His dispensation 'an empty stomach is no good for religion' is a potent call for the uplift of the deprived.

But this principle of Sri Ramakrishna is not in line with the bland equality that social scientists sometimes call for. Perhaps, to clarify what his guru meant, Swamiji said:

Absolute equality, that which means a perfect balance of all the struggling forces in all the planes, can never be in this world. Before you attain that state, the world will have become quite unfit for any kind of life, and no one will be there. We find, therefore, that all these ideas of the millennium and of absolute equality are not only impossible but also that, if we try to carry them out, they will lead us surely enough to the day of destruction. ... We come into the world with unequal endowments; we come as greater men or as lesser men, and there is no getting away from that prenatally determined condition.<sup>7</sup>

What Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji wanted was the eradication of privileges and to give everyone equal opportunities so that every section of society would flourish.

Sri Ramakrishna's disciples and followers took his message in the right spirit and became absorbed in altruistic work. One recollects in this context how Sri Ramakrishna stubbornly compelled the rich Mathur Babu to serve the indigent of the remote villages Kalaighata and Rohini in Ranaghat and Deoghar respectively. Swamiji drives this point in a letter of 19 November 1894 to Alasinga Perumal: 'Material civilisation, nay, even luxury, is necessary to

create work for the poor. Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God, who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven! Pooh! India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priestcraft is to be removed. No priestcraft, no social tyranny! More bread, more opportunity for everybody!' (4.368).

Sri Ramakrishna's intermittent samadhi and continuous non-dual vision amidst exuberant feelings of concern for the neglected and the downtrodden is puzzling to many scriptural pundits too. The seeming dichotomy of his superconscious conditions, based on the conviction of the unreality of the world, vis-à-vis his alertness regarding quotidian worldly matters—to see that those in privation and ignorance become happy—is too intricate to them.

Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949), a social scientist, said: 'The freedom of personality is a concept by which Ramakrishna has succeeded in electrifying the mentality of the middle classes, the higher classes, and the lower classes of the human society.'<sup>8</sup> During his lifetime Sri Ramakrishna had close interactions with a large number of intellectuals, social leaders, and countless common people. Everyone who conversed with him had something special to say; none could take him casually. Sarkar believes that 'Ramakrishna's claims to recognition by East and West as a world-teacher' lie 'in some very elemental characteristics' (10). He further observes:

Ramakrishna used to function as guide and friend to all and sundry in regard to the most fundamental questions of daily life. He spoke to individual men and women of flesh and blood and tried to evoke in their personalities just those human qualities which enable persons to flourish in the world. In the East as well as the West, human beings—the richest and the poorest, the expert and the layman, the businessman,

the scholar, the lawyer, the peasant and the workingman—all are at times subject to diffidence in the concerns of the day-to-day round of duties. Ramakrishna's teachings enable the meanest of human beings as well as the mightiest to combat diffidence and acquire self-confidence in the pursuit of life (ibid.).

If Sri Ramakrishna is a perfect socialist, as some might think, it is because he converted Vedanta, which looked mainly towards the transcendental, into practical Vedanta. He taught how to see the Atman in everything and everything in the Atman, so as to love and serve others as one's Self, how to feel oneness beneath the diversity of names and forms. All one needs to do is implement this high ideal through a correct

attitude towards work. The lasting effect of his contribution could place him as the highest social reformer. It is not surprising then that a few are finding him more modern than the most modern thinkers, discerning solutions to human problems for centuries to come.

Swami Bhajanananda's argument favouring Sri Ramakrishna's married life is equally intriguing from a specific historical as well as a spiritual angle. He studies the evolution of sannyasa and finds that monasticism acquired the highest ideal and the noblest way of life during the Middle Ages. The spirit of renunciation that originated in the Vedic period developed into the sannyasa ideal in the age of the Upanishads. This, he points out, had brought the practice

of skipping the intermediate two ashramas, Grihastha and Vanaprastha, by renouncing kama and *artha*—two *purusharthas*, goals of life—that were current in society. The tradition of taking sannyasa immediately after brahmacharya had a telling impact on the Indian ethos. It reduced the importance of the Grihastha and Vanaprastha ashramas. The spiritual ideal of the illumined rishi of the Vedic Age, undergoing a transition and being replaced by the sannyasa ideal, left a vacuum regarding a suitable spiritual ideal for the householders to follow—for most of the rishis were married. Then 'two thousand years later in modern times, Sri Ramakrishna revived the ancient Rishi ideal by reliving it and thus made it a practicable ideal for modern people.'<sup>9</sup> Sri Ramakrishna provided a model for moksha,

Belur Math's Old Shrine



spiritual liberation, for Grihasthas according to the mode of life of the ancient rishis.

Sri Ramakrishna often mentions Janaka in an impressive manner, presumably with a view to reinforcing the ideal householder. Janaka was a *rajarshi*, simultaneously a king and a rishi. His spiritual attainments and knowledge drew monks and householders from far and wide to receive instructions and teachings. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'On account of his detachment from the world Janaka was also known as the "Videha", that is, one free from consciousness of the body.'<sup>10</sup> He describes him as a 'great hero' for his astounding ability of managing the huge responsibilities of his kingdom as householder but without having the least sense of enjoyment and attachment. Janaka reached the acme of spiritual knowledge as well as selfless work as a result of detachment from everything transitory in the world and discernment between the Real and the unreal. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Think of king Janaka. What courage he had, indeed! He fenced with two swords, the one of knowledge and the other of work. He possessed the perfect Knowledge of Brahman and was also devoted to the duties of the world' (194). By giving Janaka's example he showed householders how to have renunciation and remain conscious of God while leading a family life.

Swamiji takes forward the glorification of householder's life in *Karma Yoga*:

The householder is the basis, the prop, of the whole society. He is the principal earner. The poor, the weak, the children and the women who do not work—all live upon the householder; so there must be certain duties that he has to perform, and these duties must make him feel strong to perform them, and not make him think that he is doing things beneath his ideal. ... He must struggle hard to acquire these things—firstly, knowledge, and secondly, wealth. It is

his duty, and if he does not do his duty, he is nobody. A householder who does not struggle to get wealth is immoral. If he is lazy and content to lead an idle life, he is immoral, because upon him depend hundreds. If he gets riches, hundreds of others will be thereby supported. ...

It is a worship for him to acquire and spend wealth nobly, for the householder who struggles to become rich by good means and for good purposes is doing practically the same thing for the attainment of salvation as the anchorite does in his cell when he is praying; for in them we see only the different aspects of the same virtue of self-surrender and self-sacrifice prompted by the feeling of devotion to God and to all that is His.<sup>11</sup>

### Committed to Truth

Swamiji says of Sri Ramakrishna: 'He was the living commentary to the Vedas and to their aim' (4.483). This statement is too terse to be intelligible to all uniformly, but what everyone can understand is that Sri Ramakrishna's life was an unwavering commitment to Truth. He sacrificed everything to God and was centred in Truth. Those who saw him day in and day out said that he was completely possessed and involuntarily led by Truth. One has to know first the ramifications of Truth in order to be able to understand why Sri Ramakrishna had a strong affinity for it. Swamiji sheds light on Sri Ramakrishna's character:

'Truth' is of two kinds: (1) that which is perceivable by the five senses of human beings and is deducible therefrom by inference, and (2) that which is perceivable by the subtle powers arising from Yoga. The knowledge acquired by the first means is called science and that acquired by the second method is the Veda. ... The person in whom that power of intuition is manifested is called a Rishi and the infinite knowledge that he comprehends through that

power is called the 'Veda'. The attainment of this Rishi-hood, the seer-ship, of the immediate knowledge of the 'Veda' is the true realization of religion.<sup>12</sup>


It may also be kept in mind in this context that those who accidentally stumble upon super-consciousness do not become seers in a trice. Yoga is a rigorous discipline involving many years of a complete orientation of life towards the ideal. If someone perchance experiences some superconscious phenomena without being trained, then the experience comes with a lot of superstitious baggage and fades away immediately, leaving them as before, let alone becoming spiritual teachers.

Swamiji teaches us that the mind works on three levels: the lowest plane of instinct, the higher plane of reason, and the highest plane of superconsciousness. The truths experienced in the highest realm do not contradict reason but transcend it. The one who experiences super-consciousness is a rishi. At that level all doubts are dissolved and the Truth shines in its pristine glory. Describing superconscious experiences in detail is difficult because of the limitations of the language. The superconscious was the natural inclination of Sri Ramakrishna's mind. He tried his best, many a time, to explain the grand finale of his spiritual experiences to others, but he was not able to. One of his disciples wrote:

One day ... the Master said very emphatically, 'I'll tell you everything today and will not keep anything secret.' He described clearly the centres and the corresponding experiences up to the heart and throat and then pointing to the spot between the eye-brows he said, 'The supreme Self is directly known and the individual experiences Samadhi when the mind comes up here. There remains then but a thin transparent screen separating the supreme Self and the individual self. The Sadhaka then experiences—', saying this, the moment he started to describe

in detail the realization of the supreme Self he was plunged in Samadhi (511).

But Sri Ramakrishna does describe super-consciousness all through his teachings. He first experienced that state and then spoke about it. That is why his words are unique and extremely simple. He made the highest Vedantic truths homely, putting off the lingual garb of metaphysics. His words are the Veda.

All temporal knowledge, ordinary or scientific, belongs to the first level Swamiji taught, and all transcendental knowledge to the second or absolute Truth. Since the first is subject to matter, time, space, and person, it is mutable; that is why it is imperfect. The second, by virtue of its being independent of all relative taints, is immutable and therefore perfect. This Truth is universally applicable, irrespective of race, culture, or creed. 

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# Vivekananda's Vision of Women

Dr R J Kalpana

I GREW UP READING Swami Vivekananda's speeches and writings. For a child just beginning its teenage journey it was thrilling to read his works. It felt as if Swamiji was in the very room with me, talking, telling me to be impossibly good, generous, and kind. I was inspired to seek the divine light within and thought in my naivety that if I wished long and hard enough, with my eyes tightly shut and sitting in a meditation pose, I just might achieve it one day. Ever since I read that the 'Master appears when one is ready', I tried to ready myself by praying earnestly.

Swamiji had a proper understanding of India's great spiritual heritage, so he restored my sense of pride in being a woman and in being born in this hallowed country, where it is said that the gods come down to walk among the people. I was stirred as much by his oratory as by his vision of life, by his conviction in the innate goodness of all human beings, and most important of all, by the power in his words. Little did I know then that I was gently guided by Swamiji, beyond what mere mortal eyes can perceive, towards that very destiny that he charted for every woman, man, and child of the world.

## **Women Today**

Swamiji wanted women to be the 'living embodiment of the Divine Mother'.<sup>1</sup> In these few words lie Truth in its entirety. 'Living' presupposes that one is not dead, neither physically, mentally, intellectually, nor spiritually. It implies that we have the ability to think for ourselves, to discern the kernel of Truth by sifting it through the

sands of gross thoughts to finally accept it. And this 'living' is possible only when women are allowed to gain a comprehensive education. In the Upanishads one finds Gargi boldly challenging the sage Yajnavalkya in a discussion about the subtle doctrine of Brahman.

'I should very much like our women to have your intellectuality' (5.412), said Swamiji to Western women. The education of women was a priority for him because it would enable women to solve their own problems independently and therefore more appropriately. Swamiji believed that if such education was imparted to women, the world would be a better place: 'There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing' (6.328).

Women today face more challenges than ever before. Education, which was considered a rarity during Swamiji's time, is now mandatory. But along with education come great responsibilities. These days women occupy some of the top positions in society, be it in politics, the corporate world, law, arts, or business. With employment come economic freedom and the thrill of new money, which underlies the personal qualities of most women and the decisions they end up making. Clearly it gives a young woman a voice to speak with—the ring of a young woman's voice is impressive when she is sure of herself. Elite education, freshly learned skills, supportive parents, and her own earned money have given her a place to stand; and she does not plan to back down, now or in the future.

Indian women are seen as embodiments of everything that is good and pious. Men might have physical power, but women have the power of forbearance. Tremendous blessings are hidden in forbearing, every saint worth his salt knows this. 'Give me the miseries of this world,' cries out the saint, knowing full well that it is through the experience of misery that God's presence is felt and the goal is approached. The ideal of Indian women is austerity and purity. Any attempt to deviate them from this ideal, as the attempt to educate them without the basis of a spiritual culture, becomes an imminent failure. We are not embodied as men and women just to satisfy our baser needs, but we are human beings meant to cherish and love each other.

### ***From Victims to 'in Control'***

With the secularization of education and a constant pressure at the workplace, with all the challenges and opportunities that the present world offers, Indian women are feeling increasingly stressed. Unfortunately, society has not kept pace with the social expectations at home. It is this contrast, this conflict that is causing stress. There is a lack of social support and proper infrastructure. Men have settled into familiar roles and women have to compete in the work environment, and that of course without neglecting their roles as wives, mothers, and citizens. So, while their sense of self-esteem and confidence has increased in several fields, it has also added a lot of extra work and stress. This has led to fractured relationships, which finally makes us question the prevailing value systems.

Cultural ambiguity resulting from changing gender roles is found at four different levels: (i) In the myth of ideal images of male and female, (ii) in the documented and scientific understanding of the social and physical world, (iii) in the institutional structures of

communication that express either equality or hierarchy, and (iv) in the psychology of the individual who selectively combines male and female traits. History and cross-cultural research reveals a gradual transformation of consciousness in society. Human beings now have a greater opportunity not to have their lives limited by cultural elements that no longer hold place in society. Societal structures have headed for a massive reconstruction due to rapid scientific and technological advances. Therefore, women are determined to move from being victims to being in control of their lives and their dreams.

The move from oppressive consciousness to self-realized consciousness is a very important journey for women; it frees them from patterns that cast them and their male counterparts in unproductive roles. Women have boldly redefined their boundaries with rare wit and sensitive acumen, refusing to be trapped within the two poles of a generalized attitude: the wicked negative—like a wanton woman—and the super positive—like the mother. They have found the courage of their convictions and have dared to dream dreams and visualize grander visions. Women recognize that they are closer to nature and therefore seek a more comprehensive and cooperative approach to life situations than violent and direct confrontations.

That is the reason why Swamiji sought to make Sita the highest ideal for Indian women to emulate. Sita sacrificed her affluence when she walked with Rama into the forests, her pride when she walked into the fire, her ego when she walked out of the palace. And at every step of the way she reminded Rama of his duty and kept him firmly on the path of dharma. She taught him how to make a home out of nothing in the forests; she reminded him of the freshness and joy of living when she sent him chasing a deer; she even sent him a reminder that she would

not sneak like a thief out of Lanka, but that Rama must come to take her home—it was his duty. It was also she who reminded him, when Mother Earth opened for her departure, that his time to leave had arrived as well.

Sita belongs to Mother Earth; her patience, understanding, forgiveness, and benevolence spring from that eternal source. We too belong to the same source. We are the ones who make reparations, who hold things together—knit one, purl two. We are constantly reminded of this in dreams and in stories. We are surrounded by images and urges, where nature wants us to see who we truly are and if we are ready to join her yet. We are meant to be permanent residents and not just tourists in her territory, for this is our motherland and our inheritance at the same time. There is an ancient saying that if you follow a powerful person long enough, someday you too will become powerful in your right.

We women are not afraid and we crave our reunion, because this is our birthright. Why else would you see so many women sitting humbly and patiently at every possible *satsang*, religious congregation, and bhajans in urban or rural areas of India? We are searching for that Mother that we once knew, seeking reunion with her once more, praying to a miraculous and loving force that exists beyond the boundaries of ego.

We women are building a motherland, each one with our plot of soil and family, our working, our spreading love in larger and larger circles—gradually, devotedly. Until one day it will be a resurrected land, a spiritual land that will coexist



*'Sita's Agni Pravesh'; by Sarada Ukil (1932)*

with other worlds. It is a world that is made out of a mother's love, her tears, and her laughter. It is a world worth making, a world worth living in, a world we have to strive to achieve.

### ***The Spiritual Journey***


Swamiji said: 'It is very difficult to understand why in this country [India] so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious self is present in all beings' (7.214). Swamiji viewed women exactly as he viewed men, as individuals with a spiritual destiny. The

Atman has neither gender nor caste nor imperfection. This is the right of every individual, this is a promise given to every individual born on earth: Self-realization. Every other pursuit pales into insignificance. No amount of material success or wealth can be compared to a single moment of spiritual bliss. God has hidden himself inside our hearts and exposed us; let us hide ourselves and expose God!

This pursuit of the Divine within is the whole idea of spirituality. We have to realize that our journey on earth is but a short journey, a transit between dimensions, and the quicker we realize it, the faster we would proceed. And making every individual turn towards Divinity is also right, eternally right: 'Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter,' (1.11) said Swamiji.

In India women are considered mothers. Who then is our highest ideal? She, the Mother of the universe, is both our inspiration and our destiny. The ideal in India is the mother, and to become a mother women generally fast and pray for days, perhaps years. Every child born through prayer is legitimate, and every child that is not born through prayer is illegitimate. Mothers go through penances and keep themselves pure through prayers and vows to bring forth a child—another soul fraught with tremendous powers for good or evil. All women are mothers first; wife, sister, aunt, daughter, and every other form of relationship stands second to her primary role of mother. It was a female sage who first found the unity of existence and laid down that doctrine in the 'Devi Suktam' of the Rig Veda. Thus it comes that we now say: 'The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle.'

In closing, I would like to leave the readers with my rendering of a story from the *Vishnu Purana*, a story that Swamiji so beautifully paraphrased in his lecture 'Maya and Freedom', published in *Jnana Yoga*. The sage Narada arrived at Vaikuntha and requested Vishnu to help him understand the whole concept of maya and how to remain without being trapped in its coils. Vishnu smiled and asked Narada to bring him a glass of water. Narada stepped out to bring a glass of water and found himself shipwrecked on earth. A local merchant's daughter fell in love with him and married him. She gave him children and they lived prosperously, until one day she too left her mortal coil. Narada found himself living his twilight years in a hut when one evening he heard a knock on his door. He opened it and found Vishnu standing at the threshold smiling and asking: 'Why Narada, what are you doing here? I asked you to bring me a glass of water. I have been waiting for you for over an hour.' Narada had the instant realization of who and what he was, of what he was doing on earth, and also of the whole concept of maya, which he wanted to understand.

We are not human beings going through a temporary spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings going through a temporary human experience! We all carry the spark of Divinity within us, but we cover our divine nature with negative thoughts and acts. God is waiting for us to join her. One day we too will be asked the same question: 'What took you so long? I have been waiting for you. What kept you? Will we have our answers ready? How many of us realize this and try to live a divine life?' 

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# Seeking Success

Abhinav Bindra

**I**N A GLOBALLY CONNECTED world Swami Vivekananda's contribution is immeasurable. He introduced India to the modern world, and the world to India. Not the India of elephants, snake-charmers, kings, queens, poverty, and so on, but India as the land of profound knowledge, deep mystic spirituality, and sublime philosophies.

So what is an Olympic gold medallist shooter doing speaking about Swami Vivekananda? I am here to share my story with you, to show that whatever your goal may be, there is only one path to success. It is the path that Swamiji summarized in his immortal words: 'Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life—think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea. That is the way to success.'<sup>1</sup>

I was thirteen years old when I first dreamt of winning an Olympic gold medal. It was not even a full-fledged idea then. It was a thought. But it stayed and became a dominant idea in my life. And I stayed with the idea. Fourteen years later I won the medal at the Beijing Olympic Games, 2008. Many events and people contributed to my success, but none of these would have helped had I not let that idea become my life—had I not dreamt it, lived it, let every part of my body, even parts of me that were not my body, such as my clothing, shoes, accessories, and so on, be full of the idea of winning an Olympic gold medal.

Winning is important for each one of us, but winning is no one's birthright. So long as

you long for something, you should say to yourself: 'I will let this idea fill my head and then I will win.' And some day, eventually, you do win. And as soon as you win, you realize the truth that you could not see earlier: winning is not just success. Let me explain. When Swamiji reached Chicago to represent India at the Parliament of World Religions in 1893, he won. He won because he first had to overcome tremendous challenges to get to the United States. But having got there, he realized that he would not be allowed to speak as a delegate unless he could present his credentials from a bona fide organization. He met Professor John Henry Wright of Harvard University, who on hearing him was thoroughly impressed, and learning that Swamiji lacked credentials to speak at the parliament, Wright is quoted saying: 'To ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine.'<sup>2</sup>

The powers at work—call them bureaucracy, red tape, administration, or the system—say to me: 'Of course you won a gold medal; you have set the world record; yes, you've won the Olympics; but you must participate in the trials for the forthcoming event.' And because the system is authoritarian, you participate in trials and they acknowledge your talents and accredit you. No system can stop real talent and a real drive towards success! Swamiji began by addressing the gathering 'Sisters and brothers of America!', and for two minutes there was thunderous applause from the audience. Two full minutes! Think about it. Another win. But winning is not success.

Moreover, you cannot win every time. That is a fact. It is a mathematical impossibility. That is why Sir Donald Bradman's cricket average, often cited as statistically the greatest achievement by any sportsperson in any major sport, is 99.94 percent, not 100 percent. You cannot win every time. You cannot expect to reach everyone you speak to. You cannot expect them to understand and embrace your point of view. You cannot expect to make a difference to every life. Winning is slow, laborious, excruciating. The higher you go, the better your performance, the more difficult it is to ascend to greater heights. Eventually, as you strive and find no improvement, you wonder: 'Is this all I am capable of? Am I not good enough to be better?' But you grit your teeth and soldier on; you hang in there, patient, persistent, persevering, until at last you find a way, a solution. And yes, you can see yourself with another win. Exhilaration sweeps you away, but only for the moment. Almost immediately anxiety, the handmaiden of exhilaration, whispers: 'Will this stay? Will you succeed the next time?' You may or you may not win again.

It is an unforgiving world. When you lose, especially in India, everyone says: 'He's lost the magic.' They write you off as a one-medal wonder. They are looking for the slightest chink in your armour, scrutinizing your face, your body language, every word, as you struggle not to show them the slow bleed inside you. You face a barrage of questions at a press conference when all you want to do is hide and lick your wounds, to find some calm amidst the chaos raging inside and around you.

What is success? Success is understanding that there is no finish line to greatness. Success is giving your all, pouring everything you have, everything you have ever known or been, into what you do. Winning is an outcome: it may

take place or it may not. It is the pursuit of winning that defines success.

How do you find success? How did Swamiji find success? Knowledge and faith were his twin towers of strength. His incredible knowledge of Hindu scriptures and philosophy coupled with his familiarity with Western thought is what allowed him, and him alone, to first breach the barriers between the East and the West. He knew what to say, but the depth and breadth of his knowledge also meant he knew how to say what he wanted to say.

I am a shooter. I do everything I can to stay in form. But form can betray—as it often does. And it can happen to everyone. When my body or mind or techniques betray me, I fall back on my success formula: knowledge and faith. I have worked all my life to know the innards of my sport. I have tried innumerable fabrics, cuts, and fits as shooting gear trying to find the one that works best for me. I have experimented with rubber from Ferrari tires for my rubber-soled shoes, because I thought that that might give me an edge. I have shot at a bull's eye with lights flashing, people shouting, clapping, and actively trying to distract me. I have embraced all this because I believe in being totally prepared. Knowledge and faith are not just my allies, they are my weapon.

Over the years I have acquired so much knowledge about my sport and about myself that whether I win or lose I gain something from it. When I win, the gain is obvious. But when I lose? What could I possibly gain? I gain more knowledge, more faith. I recognize which element was out of place that could have contributed to the loss. And I reward myself with the realization that I did some things right. Despite losing I did not get it all wrong. And so, whether I win or lose, I gain, because I gain knowledge and faith.

*(Continued on page 255)*

# Value of Brahmacharya

Swami Tathagatananda

Describing the Indian ideal of Brahmacharya in the student's life, Swami Vivekananda said: 'Brahmacharya should be like a burning fire within the veins!'<sup>1</sup>

**B**RAHMACHARYA IS an ancient practice in India. The meaning of the word is 'a course of conduct that keeps the mind on Brahman'. This course of conduct involves the control of the sense organs until a state of perfect chastity in thought, word, and deed at all times and in all conditions is attained.

The chief purpose of brahmacharya is to develop one's inner spiritual capability. The goal of brahmacharya is to dwell in God, who is all-pervading, by attaining spiritual realization. The call of the Divine itself comes through brahmacharya, which is vital for the nourishment and vigour of the brain. Only a strong, cool-brained person can withstand the rigours of deep meditation. Each person is potentially divine, though the manifestation of Divinity differs from person to person. The discipline of brahmacharya is absolutely necessary only for the serious and sincere aspirant struggling for a pure divine life.

## Spiritual Energy

Whenever human energy is restrained, be it emotional, intellectual, psychological, or physical, a great amount of power is stored. This power can be utilized in various ways. Scientists, inventors, artists, scholars, philosophers, and other creative personalities rely on this natural principle. Similarly, brahmacharya transforms the procreative energy into spiritual energy. This accumulated

spiritual energy is called *ojas* and its benefit surpasses all other gains. Swami Vivekananda says: 'The chaste brain has tremendous energy and gigantic will-power' (1.263).

The holy distinction of a true spiritual teacher is given by the great amount of *ojas* that he or she possesses. The unambiguous signpost of those holy personalities whose sweetness inexplicably attracts us is based on their *ojas*. Swamiji says:

The yogis claim that of all the energies that are in the human body the highest is what they call 'Ojas'. Now this Ojas is stored up in the brain, and the more Ojas is in a man's head, the more powerful he is, the more intellectual, the more spiritually strong. One man may speak beautiful language and beautiful thoughts, but they do not impress people; another man speaks neither beautiful language nor beautiful thoughts, yet his words charm. Every movement of his is powerful. That is the power of Ojas (1.169).

The power of continence is the greatest power for those who wish to realize God. One must be absolutely established in chastity in thought, word, and deed; the heart and the mind must be pure. Swamiji further emphasizes brahmacharya:

Now in every man there is more or less of this Ojas stored up. All the forces that are working in the body in their highest become Ojas. ... The Yogis say that part of the human energy which is expressed as sex energy, in sexual thought, when checked and controlled, easily becomes changed into Ojas, and as the Mula-dhara guides these, the Yogi pays particular

attention to that centre. He tries to take up all his sexual energy and convert it into Ojas. It is only the chaste man or woman who can make the Ojas rise and store it in the brain; that is why chastity has always been considered the highest virtue. A man feels that if he is unchaste, spirituality goes away; he loses mental vigour and moral stamina. That is why in all the religious orders in the world which have produced spiritual giants you will always find absolute chastity insisted upon. That is why the monks came into existence, giving up marriage. There must be perfect chastity in thought, word, and deed; without it, the practice of Raja-Yoga is dangerous, and may lead to insanity. If people practise Raja-Yoga and at the same time lead an impure life, how can they expect to become Yogis? (1.169–70).

Swamiji also highlights the need for the ancient ideal of brahmacharya in the modern education of students: 'The old institution of "living with the Guru" and similar systems of imparting education are needed. What we want are Western science coupled with Vedanta, Brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and also Shraddha and faith in one's own self' (5.366).

Millions of householders earnestly cultivate some sort of deep abiding faith in God and struggle daily to achieve a meaningful and peaceful life. Spiritual fulfilment comes when we have an intimate relationship with God. Therefore, at a particular stage of family life couples should sublimate their worldly intimacy by withdrawing from worldly life and focusing to develop spiritual intimacy with God. Sri Ramakrishna exalts those couples who, after bringing one or two children into the world, can restrain from intercourse and look upon each other as brother and sister. He instructs some devotees to chant the name of the Lord to combat the forces of impure thoughts and keep the mind filled with pure thoughts. In *Modern Man in Search of*

*a Soul* Carl Jung suggests that after the age of thirty-five or forty one should turn from worldly to cultural development, that is, the inner life of the Spirit. Continence is not for yogis alone. It is for all people who want to lead a healthy and happy life. For spiritual seekers, however, it is most important.

### **Current Crisis of Sensate Disorder**

A greatly diminished spiritual consciousness on a broad scale causes sexual anarchy, a conspicuous crisis today. This sensate disorder, with the dominant desire of satisfying the cravings of the senses, dissipates the vital moral and intellectual energy of entire societies. Pitirim A Sorokin (1889–1968), Harvard University's late chairman of sociology, called it the 'sex revolution'. Though unarmed, this silent pervasive revolt has successfully enlisted millions of people worldwide, with devastating results. The breakdown of the core of civilization—the family, impaired physical and mental health, and loss of creativity—make this insurgency no less significant than other revolutions.

In his book *Sane Sex Order*, Dr Sorokin addressed the insidious effects of television broadcasting, on which scant regulations and restrictions are imposed: 'So far, almost the only important achievement of this new instrument of communication (television) has consisted in bringing into millions of our homes the erotically charged, alcoholic atmosphere of night clubs, ugly commercials, and endless murder-and-sex plays.'<sup>2</sup>

Further in his book Dr Sorokin points out the historical basis for the cultural benefits of restricting sexual freedom:

Civilized societies which have most strictly limited sexual freedom have developed the highest culture. In the whole of human history not a single case is found in which a society has

been able to advance to the Rationalistic culture without its women being born and reared in a rigidly enforced pattern of faithfulness to one man. Further, there is no example of a community, which has retained its high position on the culture scale after less rigorous sexual customs have replaced more restricting ones (38).

Dr Alexis Carrel (1873–1944), a physician at the Rockefeller Institute who won the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1911, wrote *Man, the Unknown*, a bestseller translated into twelve languages. In this book Dr Carrel observes the physical and mental benefits of continence:

It is well known that sexual excesses impede intellectual activity. In order to reach its full power, intelligence seems to require both the presence of well-developed sexual glands and the temporary repression of the sexual appetite. Freud has rightly emphasized the capital importance of sexual impulses in the activities of consciousness. However, his observations refer chiefly to sick people. His conclusions should not be generalized to include normal individuals, especially those who are endowed with a strong nervous system and a mastery over themselves. While the weak, the nervous, and the unbalanced become more abnormal when their sexual appetites are repressed, the strong are rendered still stronger by practicing such a form of asceticism.<sup>3</sup>

In *Insanity: Its Classification, Diagnosis and Treatment* the eminent American neurologist, psychiatrist, and health reformer Dr Edward Charles Spitzka also confirmed that excessive sensuous gratification invariably brings mental and physical illness.<sup>4</sup> Illness signifies impurity in the mind and the body. Therefore, to follow the practice of brahmacharya every spiritual aspirant should know something about purifying nourishment and its significance in spiritual life.

### **Purifying Nourishment**

The vital medicine for the soul is purifying nourishment. The sage of the *Chhandogya Upanishad* says:

When nourishment is pure, reflection and higher understanding become pure.

When reflection and higher understanding are pure, memory becomes strong.

When memory becomes strong, there is release from all the knots of the heart.<sup>5</sup>

Pure food produces a pure nature, impure food an impure nature. There are two types of nourishing food. One type is food that is prepared peacefully, with spiritual thoughts, and is offered to God before being taken. It should be taken with the intention to maintain the body as God's instrument. Sri Ramanuja teaches the proper acquisition, preparation, and consumption of food according to the scriptures. The other type of food is described by Acharya Shankara in terms of its psychological and ethical significance: nourishing food gathered by the perceptive and imaginative faculties of the pure mind, which receives only pure impressions. Only a pure mind is capable of comprehending and realizing the Truth. Therefore, aspirants should strictly observe the correct diet and shut themselves off from outside influences.

The *Brahma Sutra* allows one exception: 'One can eat all kinds of food when life is in danger.'<sup>6</sup>

### **Practice of Brahmacharya**

In his *Yoga Sutra*, Patanjali says: '*Brahmacharya-pratishthayam virya-labbah*; on being firmly established in sexual continence vigour (is) gained.'<sup>7</sup> Brahmacharya is more than control of the procreative energy. The vitality of brahmacharya replaces weakness, laziness, and lack of spirituality with exceptional resilience, strength, and energy throughout one's entire being. With

the required control of all the senses, the body and the mind are joined in the conscious endeavour to achieve chastity. The accumulated spiritual energy that this produces must be used for spiritual practices and loving service to humanity. These qualities lead the brahmachari to the highest illumination.

India's recent history produced a glorious example of dedication to the spirit of brahmacharya in Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). Gandhi summoned all the strength of his mind and spiritual discipline in a lifelong, matchless struggle to achieve the ancient spirit of brahmacharya:

The knowledge that a perfect observance of *brahmacharya* means realization of *brahman*, I did not owe to a study of the Shastras [scriptures]. It slowly grew upon me with experience. The shastraic [scriptural] texts on the subject I read only later in life. Every day of the vow has taken me nearer the knowledge that in *brahmacharya* lies the protection of the body, the mind and the soul. For *brahmacharya* was now no process of hard penance, it was a matter of consolation and joy. Every day revealed a fresh beauty in it.

But if it was a matter of ever increasing joy, let no one believe that it was an easy thing for me. Even when I am past fifty-six years, I realize how hard a thing it is. Every day I realize more and more that it is like walking on the sword's edge, and I see every moment the necessity for eternal vigilance.<sup>8</sup>

From his own experiments with fasting and control of the palate through dietary restrictions, Gandhi ardently advocated controlling the senses in thought, word, and deed for the welfare of the individual, the family, and society:

Mere control of animal passion has been thought to be tantamount to observing Brahmacharya. I feel that this conception is incomplete and wrong. Brahmacharya is the control of all the organs of sense. He who

attempts to control only one organ and allows all the others free play is bound to find his effort futile. To hear suggestive stories with the ears, to see suggestive sights with the eyes, to taste stimulating food with the tongue, to touch exciting things with the hands, and then at the same time, try to control the only remaining organ, is like putting one's hands in the fire and expecting to escape being burnt. He therefore who is resolved to control the one must be likewise determined to control the rest. I have always felt that much harm has been done by the narrow definition of Brahmacharya. If we practise simultaneous self-control in all directions, the attempt will be scientific and possible of success.<sup>9</sup>

Brahmacharya is the most vital aspect of the power of tapas, the creative impulse behind penance and austerity that helps humanity evolve spiritually. Brahmacharya as a spiritual direction and tapas as a spiritual motive constitute the essence of India's culture.

### **Integrated Approach to Self-restraint**

On one occasion Swami Brahmananda told one of his foremost disciples: 'Give your body and mind to worldly enjoyments, and the world will destroy them both. Devote them to God and His service, and you will enjoy bodily health, peace of mind, and spiritual joy.'<sup>10</sup>

Swami Brahmananda gives the following advice: 'If you merely say: "I will conquer lust, I will conquer anger and greed," you can never conquer them; but if you can fix your mind on God, the passions will leave you of themselves. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The more you move eastward, the farther you are from the west." Call on God and pray to Him. Then the objects of sense will no longer attract you' (356–7).

Ordinary experience teaches us that a confrontational or careless attitude leads to bad results. Lower impulses are sublimated and

redirected through the force of one's will, not through violence. Swami Brahmananda advises against extremes: 'There are certain rules which a Brahmacharin must observe. He must avoid exciting food, over-sleep, over-exercise, laziness, bad company and evil conversations.'<sup>11</sup> The best is to follow an integrated practical approach through the combination of simple regulated breathing exercises, concentration of the mind and meditation, prayer and worship of God, study of the scriptures, japa, and association with holy persons.

We overcome the idea of gender by associating it with the idea of purity and by meditating on Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. For example, to control the senses Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples to rely on practices other than hatha yoga. He advised Yogin, later Swami Yogananda, to repeat God's name with a concentrated mind, which he did, much to his benefit and power of renunciation. Another was told to meditate on the form of the Divine Mother Kali upon his chest when lying down to sleep. Latu, later Swami Adbhutananda, was told to counteract all impure thoughts by simply thinking of the Master. These instructions helped them keep their minds on the Divine and to develop *atma-buddhi*—seeing themselves and everything around them as the pure, radiant, immortal Atman, without any gender.

Purity of the mind is primary, physical cleanliness secondary. As meditation increases, body-consciousness decreases. Swamiji says:

When there is real purification of the body, external and internal, there arises neglect of the body, and the idea of keeping it nice vanishes. A face which others call most beautiful will appear to the Yogi as merely animal, if there is not intelligence behind it. What the world calls a very common face he regards as heavenly, if the spirit shines behind it. This thirst after body is the great bane of human life. So the first sign of the establishment of purity is that you do not care to think you are a body. It is only when purity comes that we get rid of the body idea.<sup>12</sup>

A weak, wavering mind is equally the source of great affliction. The problem must be solved at the spiritual level. The media today lures the



mind into a phantasmagoria that leaves deep impressions upon it. Patanjali says: 'To obstruct thoughts that are inimical to yoga, contrary thoughts should be brought.'<sup>13</sup> Swamiji says: 'Expansion is life, contraction is death.'<sup>14</sup> Whatever unfolds the soul within is expansion, whatever hides the soul is contraction. To expand our consciousness we need the moral strength of sense-restraint and detachment. We should also do intense japa of the holy name or mantra, directing our thoughts to God. The passions cannot be eradicated, but they can be educated. Sri Ramakrishna says that passions directed towards the world and its objects behave like enemies, but when they are directed towards God, they become the best friends, for they lead to God:

Direct the six passions to God. The impulse of lust should be turned into the desire to have intercourse with Atman. Feel *angry* at those who stand in your way to God. Feel *greedy* for Him. If you must have the feeling of *I and mine*, then associate it with God. Say, for instance, 'My Rama, my Krishna.' If you must have *pride*, then feel like Bibhishana, who said, 'I have touched the feet of Rama with my head; I will not bow this head before anyone else.'<sup>15</sup>

A healthy, transformed life of humility and discernment is the proof of purity. We should cultivate abiding love for the virtues and pray for a pure mind and heart. Purity and virtue brighten the intellect, vice weakens it. Therefore, spiritual teachers recommend detachment from the senses and steadfast practice of meditation on God. The sage of the *Maitri Upanishad* says: 'By self-discipline purification of the mind is attained. Through purification of the mind clear understanding is reached. Through clear understanding Self-knowledge

is gained.'<sup>16</sup> Jesus Christ says: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'<sup>17</sup> 'Pure in heart' means a moral life; Christ teaches this to his disciples and to all who 'have ears to hear' due to its great significance.

### **Fruit of Brahmacharya**

Learning about the fruit of brahmacharya helps us live a pure life. Brahmacharya awakens the faculty of intuition, whose spiritual power lies latent within us. In its broadest sense, brahmacharya means spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna says that a brahmachari can realize God with the help of his penetrating mind: 'If a man practices absolute continence for twelve years, the Medhanadi [nerve of intelligence] will open (*i.e.* his powers of understanding will blossom). His understanding will become capable of penetrating and comprehending the subtlest of ideas. With such an understanding man can realize God. God can be attained only through a purified understanding of this type.'<sup>18</sup>

Swamiji says: 'By the observance of Brahmacharya all learning can be mastered in a very short time—one has an unfailing memory of what one hears or knows but once.'<sup>19</sup> God-realization is the fruit of brahmacharya:

That power may come to all. That power comes to him who observes unbroken Brahmacharya for a period of twelve years, with the sole object of realizing God. I have practised that kind of Brahmacharya myself, and so a screen has been removed, as it were, from my brain. For that reason, I need not any more think over or prepare myself for any lectures on such a subtle subject as philosophy. ... It is not any power which is exclusively my own. Whoever will practice unbroken Brahmacharya for twelve years will surely have it. If you do so, you too will get it. Our Shastras do not say that only such and such a person will get it and not others! (5.358).

Swamiji assures us that in its advanced stages brahmacharya transforms the entire being: 'Complete continence gives great intellectual and spiritual power. The Brahmacharin must be sexually pure in thought, word, and deed. Lose regard for the body; get rid of the consciousness of it so far as possible' (7.67). 'Controlled desire leads to the highest result. Transform the sexual energy into the spiritual energy, but do not emasculate, because that is throwing away the power. The stronger this force, the more can be done with it. Only a powerful current of water can do hydraulic mining' (7.69). 'The chaste brain has tremendous energy and gigantic will-power. Without chastity there can be no spiritual strength. Continence gives wonderful control over mankind. The spiritual leaders of men have been very continent, and this is what gave them power. Therefore the Yogi must be continent' (1.263).

The purified mind flooded with spiritual ideas easily lifts the veil of ignorance. Through the combined practice of continence, mental discipline, scriptural study, and meditation the pure radiance of the immortal soul is uncovered.

Great mystics of the world have always assigned the greatest significance to chastity, admitting occasionally its difficulties. Brother Giles, one of the foremost disciples of St Francis, taught that chastity is a primary, pristine virtue: 'Amongst all other virtues I would set the virtue of chastity first, because sweet chastity contains all perfection in itself; but there is no other virtue which can ever be perfect without chastity. Chastity is, in strict truth, the careful and continual custody of our corporeal and spiritual senses, in order to preserve them pure and immaculate for God alone.'<sup>20</sup>

The perfect brahmacharin demonstrates purity, equanimity, contentment, peacefulness,

steadfastness, cheerfulness, sweetness, self-restraint, health, and above all purified understanding. Lifelong brahmacharya, obedience to the spiritual instructions of the guru, and faith in oneself impart spiritual excellence and fullness to others.



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# ***Death before Birth: A Curse of Modern Technology***

**Dr Merina Islam**

Nobody can hurt you  
without your permission.

—Mahatma Gandhi

In every girl is a goddess.

—Francesca Lia Block

**I**NDIA IS ADVANCING FAST in the field of science and technology, but if we look at the grass-roots level the picture is rather dark, especially when it comes to the treatment of women. The status of females in India aptly symbolizes India's status as a developing nation. In the twenty-first century the girl child continues to be murdered before she is born. Female infanticide has been practised in Indian society for hundreds of years and still is prevalent. Professor Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate in economics, has expressed deep concern over female feticide and the twenty-five million 'missing women' in India.

## ***The Killing Factors***

Girls in India are facing a severe threat to their very survival. Recently, one of the leading Indian newspapers reported that people from some parts of the country were paying bride-price and importing girls from other parts of the country as life-partners for their sons. Though the practice of paying bride-price had existed historically in some tribes of India, the present scenario is different, as it is now being practised by sections of society in which it was absent in the past. Therefore, this recent phenomenon can be attributed

mainly to excessive gender-selective abortions among those sections of society. In the past the girl child was killed in India by often putting opium on the mother's nipple, or by putting the afterbirth over the child's face, or by applying tobacco in the nostrils of the child, or by ill-treating and not feeding the female infant. The British first discovered this pernicious practice in 1789. It was found to exist in various parts of North and West India among Rajputs, Jats, Ahirs, Gujjars, Khatns, Moyals, Brahmins, Jewa Patidars, and Kanbis. The British tried to ban this practice by passing the Bengal Regulatory Act 21 of 1795, the Regulation Act 6 of 1802, and the Act 8 of 1870, popularly known as The Female Infanticide Act. The available evidence makes it amply clear that female infanticide in nineteenth-century India had been prevalent mainly in higher social groups, though other castes had also adopted the practice to some extent.

A declining sex ratio reflects gross discrimination against one gender. Daughters are always seen as a burden because of the dowry to be paid for their marriages and because many consider that any 'investment' in them—nutrition, education, health, general well-being—will not return to the family's assets!

Violence against women is a common feature in a patriarchal society, and in such societies even technology is not gender-neutral. In India the patriarchal system coupled with modern technologies of gender determination and gender preselection give rise to a more sophisticated

form of violence against the female child. The availability of the scanning technology has extended the gender bias from 'womb to tomb' by giving parents an opportunity to eliminate a daughter in the womb instead of killing her after birth. This is reflected in the continuous decline in the juvenile sex ratio in India. Female feticide and infanticide are mass killings. This phenomenon is used to manipulate the societal power structure by reducing the number of women. In a democracy, where numbers are a paramount source of power, the dwindling number of women contributes to their marginalization.

The presence of a female fetus was originally discovered during the diagnosis of congenital abnormalities in the early stages of pregnancy. Unfortunately, the technology used in this discovery has been misused by money-minded doctors, on the requests of parents, who want a male child. This technology, which was created to detect any abnormalities in the fetus, turned baneful for the girl child by denying her the right to be born. Cities as well as small towns were flooded with advertisements inciting people to get relief from future dowry expenses by spending a small amount on these tests. Thus, these techniques combined with a patriarchal system are responsible for skewing the sex ratio in India.

A natural antipathy towards the female gender combined with these factors have led to the mortality differentials by gender. The increasing economic marginalization of women and the greater socio-cultural devaluation is aggravating the situation further. In fact, cultural factors seem to have a considerable grip over different sections of women in Indian society, resulting in gender discrimination. This is a 'culture against females'<sup>1</sup> and consequently there arises a powerful relationship between culture and mortality, since culture has its strong effect not only on the female role and status but also on female survival itself.

The decrease of women in India's population has been documented ever since the first decennial enumeration in the late nineteenth century. During the last one hundred years the population gap between men and women has progressively widened, becoming a cause of concern after the 2001 census. That census recorded the juvenile sex ratio and established female feticide along with several other factors, like under-enumeration in the census, gender-selective migrations, and gender differentials in mortality for the asymmetrical population of the girl child. Not only did the sex ratio in India register continuous decline, but even the juvenile sex ratio followed a similar trend. Moreover, the phenomenon of gender-selective abortion has broken the north-south divide and it has spread, though with varying intensity, to even those regions that were earlier not known for an anti-female bias. Thus, the 'northernization of sex ratio'<sup>2</sup> can be seen across the country. From 1901 there has been a general shift of districts with higher sex ratio to the lower decile groups.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Sex Ratio in India 1901–2011***

Year	FMR	Decadal Variation	FMR (0-6 years)	Decadal Variation
1901	971	-8	-	-
1911	963	-8	-	-
1921	955	-8	-	-
1931	950	-5	-	-
1941	945	-5	-	-
1951	946	+1	-	-
1961	941	-5	967	-
1971	931	-10	964	-3
1981	935	+4	962	-2
1991	927	-8	945	-17
2001	933	+6	927	-18
2011	940	+7	914	-13

Source: 'Provisional Population Totals', *Census of India, 2011*

As can be observed in the table above, there has been a progressive decline in the female-male ratio (FMR) in India. If we look at the decadal variation, we find that it was -8 from 1911 to 1921 and -5 from 1931 to 1941. An increase of +1 can be



seen in the year 1951, followed again by a dip of -5 in 1961. The census of 1971 registered a maximum gap of -10, followed by an increase of +4 in 1981. In 1991 a decadal variation of -8 was recorded. But the censuses of 2001 and 2011 have registered an increase of +6 and +7 points respectively in the FMR. The 2011 census has recorded the highest FMR since the 1971 census. On the basis of the above data, can we conclude that the gap of -8 in the 1991 census is to be attributed to the popularity of gender-determination tests in the 1980s, while the increase in the FMR in 2001 and 2011 to the ban on these tests after the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act? Probably not, because a look at the juvenile sex ratio (FMR 0-6 years) puts a question mark on these conclusions, as in those decades only the sex ratio declined. The juvenile sex ratio has registered a continuous decline, with a decadal variation of -3, -2, -17, -18, and -13 in the years 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, and 2011 respectively. The census of 2011 has recorded the

lowest ever juvenile sex ratio of 914, with 3 million missing girls—from 78.8 million in 2001 to 75.8 million in 2011. The decline in the juvenile sex ratio up to the 1981 census could be attributed to the female infanticide and higher mortality rate among girl children, caused mainly by neglect and discrimination. But the sharp decline in the juvenile sex ratio in the 1991, 2001, and 2011 censuses is definitely the outcome of the increasing female feticide perpetrated through gender-determination tests and selective abortions of female fetuses, which became prevalent in the 1980s after the New Bhandari Hospital Controversy of Amritsar. Thus, the decline in the sex ratio exhibited a positive correlation with the increase in the availability of ultrasound machines. The gravity of the situation can also be weighed up by the fact that according to

Campaign against Female Feticide, 90 per cent of the estimated 3.5 million abortions in India are to eliminate girls!<sup>4</sup> According to the United Nations, an estimated 2,000 unborn girls are illegally aborted every day in India.

The 2011 census also shows that the Indian states with the worst child sex ratio are not the most backward. The prosperous states of Haryana and Punjab have the worst child sex ratio, followed by Delhi and Chandigarh. Uttar Pradesh, which is less prosperous than Maharashtra and Gujarat, has better child sex ratio than both the latter states. Therefore, it would be misleading to consider that poorer families and illiterate people go for female feticide. An adverse sex ratio in the rich and educated states of Punjab, Haryana, and Gujarat also points to this fact. The decline in the juvenile sex ratio is a threat not only to women but also to humankind. However, some small-minded economists and doctors have supported the practice by

citing the law of demand and supply. According to them, if the supply of women is reduced, their status will be automatically enhanced because the scarcity of women will increase their value. But a rise in crime against women does not support this logic. Rather, the decrease in the number of women has resulted in the re-introduction of polyandry in certain communities in Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Gujarat. Some people also support female feticide on the pretext of population control; they believe that a lesser number of women would reduce the rate of reproduction, which in turn would control population growth—yes, there are people who think in this way!

### **The Social Aspect**

A patriarchal social structure, the segregation of women, poverty, dowry—all these have created an atmosphere where females are often considered a nuisance. Such mentality and behaviour are responsible for other kinds of problems like violence, rape, feticide, infanticide, marginalization, lack of empowerment, exploitation, cultural domination, and traditional notions of polyandrous marriages.

The socio-cultural milieu of Indian society almost compels one to give birth to a male child. For this purpose, people in India have always adopted a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, they performed various kinds of rituals to ensure the birth of a male child, and on the other, they evolved and adopted newer techniques to eliminate the girl child. With changing times these techniques also changed, but its prime motive remained the same. Earlier it was female infanticide and neglect of the girl child, which resulted in a lesser number of girls in the family; now it is female feticide.

India's preference for sons manifests in the subordinate position of women in society. Due

to the practice of dowry, women are considered a drain and economic liability on the family income. The birth of a son is seen as an opportunity for upward mobility within the societal hierarchy, while the birth of a daughter is believed to cause downward mobility. Doctors also played on this attitude to attract parents towards gender-determination tests by advertising in newspapers with slogans like this: 'Spend ₹ 500 now and save ₹ 50,000 later.' The UN recommendation that considers household work by women as part of the national income has not been implemented so far. Therefore, females are perceived as a burden that forces parents to adopt all available ways and means to eliminate them. On the basis of data collected from Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh, the Voluntary Health Association of India reported that dowry, threat to chastity, and problems related to the marriage of a daughter are some of the reasons behind female feticide.

Besides, attaining *pitriloka*, the world of the manes, also motivates parents to go for the test and abort female fetuses. There is a belief among some people that parents should not expect support from daughters during old age as they are the property of others. This makes the girl child unwanted and promotes female feticide.

The patrilineal necessity of a heir to one's wealth was also cited as one of the reasons for female feticide. Women, who were daughters-in-law, had the responsibility to beget sons so that the lineage did not end with them. As a consequence, such women aborted their female fetuses. This was especially true of women who had delivered their children through Caesarean section, because these women cannot undergo more than two or three deliveries.

While these were the reasons given by parents in support of female feticide, it is interesting to note the reasons given by doctors in support of this heinous crime. Most of the doctors either

supported the test on the pretext of 'small family' norms or they tried to cover it up under the garb of parents' right to choose the gender of their child. Some conscientious doctors opposed the tests and female feticide on ethical grounds and formed an association against the practice. But the district administration finds itself helpless as such cases go largely unreported.

The above discussion shows that though several explanations have been advanced, the available evidence indicates that the factor responsible for the decline in the sex ratio in India is the mortality pattern, which is highly unfavourable to woman. The gender differential in mortality is a direct concomitant of highly discriminatory socioeconomic practices, which start before the birth of a female child. The social unpopularity of the female child, the low status of women with low levels of education and employability, and excessive child-bearing, which may also partly be due to women's low status, are major contributory factors in the higher rate of mortality among females. Such increased female mortality reflects a terrible inequality and injustice to the means of sustaining life. Such under-valuation of females suggests social insanity.

Consequently, gender discrimination emerges as the crucial determinant of the present pattern of sex ratio in India. In most countries cultural and social factors do not have an effect on gender. In India, however, it has been found to be favourable to the male gender. When resources like money and time are few and other opportunities are limited, the gender bias works to the advantage of the male over the female. This leads us to understand that feminism is not irrelevant in the context of our study, because according to this school of thought, it is the patriarchal system that is responsible for the exploitation of women and all forms of gender discrimination.

### ***The Struggle***

The rising cases of female feticide and the ensuing protests from women groups resulted in a ban on gender-determination tests in government hospitals in 1976. This led to the huge proliferation of private hospitals and clinics offering the tests throughout the country. Feminists, lawyers, scientists, researchers, doctors, women's organizations, and all other stakeholders collectively protested against female feticide. Some research organizations like Research Centre on Women's Studies, Mumbai; Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), Delhi; Voluntary Health Organization; and Foundation for Research in Community Health also took a firm stand against the tests. In 1982 the CWDS launched the first campaign against feticide.

Law exists for the well-being of the people, but the same law can sometimes be misused in the name of well-being. The enactment of the law in the form of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1974 declared abortion legal under certain conditions during the first trimester of pregnancy. To ensure proper implementation of this law in an era of technological advancement, much consideration has been given by the Supreme Court of India. The State of Maharashtra enacted the Maharashtra Regulation of Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act of 1988, prohibiting the determination of the sex of a fetus and issuing the direction to the medical staff and concerned agencies for its proper regulations. Similar efforts at the national level resulted in the enactment of the Central Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1994. This Act was amended in 2003 and is now called the Preconception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 2003. Some of the salient features of this Act are: (i) Prohibition of preconception and prenatal diagnostic techniques (PNDT) (prohibition

of sex selection) of fetus, leading to female feticide (Section 6); (ii) prohibition of advertisement of PNDT for determination of sex (Section 22); (iii) permission and regulation of the use of PNDT for the purpose of detection of specific genetic abnormalities or disorders (Section 4).

However, these Acts had many loopholes and their proper implementation became almost impossible. Granting licenses to private centres or laboratories for performing the tests was against the demand of women activists. Although the clause relating to punishment of women undergoing the gender-determination test stated that a woman would normally be considered innocent unless proved otherwise, in the Indian social context proving that a woman was pressurized for undergoing the gender-determination tests would be difficult. Besides, the act denies the right to move the court by any individual or organization.

The PNDT (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1994 came into force on 1 January 1996. The Act prohibited the communication of the gender of the fetus 'to the pregnant woman or to her relatives by words, signs, or in any other manner'. It also prohibited the use of PNDT, including ultrasonography, for the purpose of determining the gender of a fetus. Further, registration of genetic counselling centres, labs, or clinics had been made compulsory to ensure accountability. The Act prohibited advertisements of prenatal determination of gender in any manner and made every offence under

the Act as cognizable, non-viable, and non-compoundable. The provisions of the Act had been grossly violated and it failed to stop the practice. The improper implementation of the Act led to the filing of a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court in the year 2000 by Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal, Pune, and the Centre for the Enquiry of Health and Allied Themes, Mumbai. In May 2001 the Supreme Court directed the centre and all state governments to take necessary steps to implement the Act in all its aspects. The amended Act prohibited gender selection before or after conception, besides regulating the PNDT.

Violence against women, in one form or the other, has always existed in Indian society with some degree of social sanction. Female feticide, the most heinous of all forms of violence against women, has merely added one more dimension to it. It is a manifestation of deep-rooted bias against women, which is the characteristic of a patriarchal social system that thrives on the subordination of women.


It has to be acknowledged also that in the last few decades India has witnessed an all-round development of women. Due to the efforts of



women activists, women have received a respectable position in society to a large extent. Change is evident, but much more is to be done. Women are now trying to make their presence felt in almost every walk of life. They are the ones who take better care of their parents in their old age and can even earn well to sustain them. It is high time to realize the significance of women as a social force, for both men and women together contribute to the continuity of the human race.

Mere legal enactments for safeguarding the rights of women and children will not serve their purpose until the mindset and attitudes of people change. The growing problem of missing girls and declining child sex ratio in India will impede human development towards full gender parity. Thus, everyone has a stake in helping overcome these destructive and regressive customs. Social scientists, medical practitioners, common people, the judiciary, legal professionals, NGOs—all need to focus on a humanist and scientific approach. There is also the need for a strong ethical code for medical practitioners. The monitoring, regular appraisal, and assessment of indicators

such as sex ratio, female mortality, and female literacy are required in a time frame management. Those who, consciously or unconsciously, violate the laws that protect women and female children have to be brought to the attention of the appropriate authority and be punished accordingly.

Female feticide is not an issue of gender 'determination', it is an issue of gender 'discrimination', and so long as such discriminatory practices continue, society will never achieve a decent level of mental, physical, and spiritual sanity. 

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3. See I Sen, 'The Indian Sex Ratio: Patterns in Time and Space' in *Enduring Conundrum: India's Sex Ratio*, eds V Mazumdar and N Krishnaji (New Delhi: Rainbow, 2001), 120–42.
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# Vivekananda's Impact on the World of Ideas

Dr Satish K Kapoor

(Continued from the previous issue)

THE POPULARITY OF Vedanta and yoga the world over is due to the efforts of Swami Vivekananda. He expounded the purest form of yoga and presented its secrets and esoteric aspects rationally, hitherto lost in magic, powers, and gymnastics.

## Pioneer of Yoga to the West

Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*, published in the US in July 1895, created a great impact in social and religious circles. William James, a professor at Harvard and the well-known author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, was so impressed by the book that he personally met Vivekananda. The book ran into three editions in a short period and was also appreciated by Leo Tolstoy (1828–1901), who after going through some more lectures and writings of Vivekananda intended to publish the quintessential of his thoughts—but Tolstoy's plan did not materialize.<sup>40</sup>

Although a small number of nineteenth-century Americans were familiar with Indian philosophy through the Transcendentalist writings of Ralph W Emerson (1803–82), Henry David Thoreau (1817–62), Walt Whitman (1819–92), and a few others, none had heard Vedanta and yoga in a modern idiom from an authority. For the intelligentsia it was, and still is, a revelation due to its lucidity and depth.

The view that Vivekananda spoke only on raja, bhakti, jnana, and karma yogas and did not talk about hatha yoga, which is today very popular, is incorrect. Vivekananda believed that hatha yoga promoted physical culture but did not have

much to do with spiritual development. He regarded health as a means to an end. He suggested a simple posture in line with the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, which says: '*Sthira-sukham-asanam*; posture is that which is firm and pleasant.'<sup>41</sup> Vivekananda advised thus: 'After bathing, sit down and hold the seat firm, that is, imagine that you sit firm as a rock, that nothing can move you. Hold the head and shoulders and the hips in a straight line, keeping the spinal column free; all action is along it, and it must not be impaired.'<sup>42</sup>

A specific asana may not be easy for everybody, so Vivekananda emphasized that an uncomfortable posture should be avoided as it would impede concentration: 'That posture which is the easiest for one should be the one chosen' (1.137). Asanas are of two categories: *darshanatmaka*, those derived from hoary tradition and have a philosophy, and *pradarshanatmaka*, exhibitiv, having no basis in mainstream yogic texts. The very purpose of yoga is lost when asanas are demonstrated to gain popularity. Asana is only a preparation for something higher; it is important as it helps stabilize the body for the smooth flow of the *prana*, vital force. But it is not an end in itself, since the aim of yoga is moksha, freedom. That explains why Vivekananda, like Sri Ramakrishna, did not suggest difficult postures. Moreover, he did not equate yoga with asana, as is being currently done. His emphasis was on the psychic and spiritual aspects, physical and mental hygiene, right breathing, and concentration.

The finer forms of kundalini yoga popular in the West can also be traced to Vivekananda's

talks and works. References to the kundalini occur in *Raja Yoga* and in some of his lectures. He spoke about the art of breathing, its timing, importance, and the purificatory processes of the *nadis*, psychic currents, specially the *ida*, representing the moon; the *pingala*, representing the sun; and the dormant *sushumna*. These currents operate in the spinal column for the flow of *prana*. Vivekananda also explained *chidakasha*, knowledge space; *chittakasha*, mental space; the seven chakras; the *siddhis*; and *ojas*, vitality achieved through transmutation of sexual energy into spiritual energy. Vivekananda emphasized chastity in thought, word, and deed as a prerequisite to the practice of kundalini yoga.

*Anuloma-viloma pranayama*, alternate breathing, which has also become popular in recent times, finds mention in *Raja Yoga*, though without its technical name. Likewise Vivekananda refers to concentration on the tip of nose, which is *agochari mudra*. Of the six purificatory rites described in yogic texts, he refers in particular to *neti*, in which liquids are drawn through the nose for a therapeutic cleansing of the upper body. Moreover, Vivekananda alludes to a form of *sahaja* yoga or mantra yoga, when he prescribes to ‘join the mental repetition of the “Om”’ (1.167) along with pranayama, a method followed by many yoga practitioners today. For the awakening of the kundalini he asks the practitioners to visualize during pranayama a triangle ‘surrounded by flames and with the serpent coiled in the middle’ (8.47). This makes the mind steady and ensures that the *prana* can subsequently flow through the *sushumna* and pierce the six chakras to reach the seventh, the *sahasrara*, the thousand-petalled chakra, or lotus, on the top of the head where it can unite with Shiva. The kundalini has its seat in the *mula-dhara* chakra at the base of the spine, from where it has to be raised to the *sahasrara*.

Many schools of yoga that teach methods such as yogic breathing, complete breathing, pranic breathing, pranic healing, and so on largely owe their scientific explanation to Vivekananda. In course of time these breathing methods took different forms and channels of expression, while Vivekananda’s contribution remained forgotten. He was also the first to speak in the West about dietetics—the usefulness of simple, digestible, and non-stimulating food for the body and the mind. Besides, he also spoke of the conservation of nervous energy, regulation of corrosive emotions, and the *raison d’être* of religious chanting and meditation for peace and poise.

The *Indian Mirror* of 18 January 1896 reported that Vivekananda’s classes on Hindu philosophy and yoga were being attended by the elite. ‘It is indeed a rare sight to see some of the most fashionable ladies in London seated on the floor cross-legged, of course, for want of chairs, listening with all the Bhakti of an Indian chela [disciple] towards his guru.’<sup>43</sup>

### Inherent Human Divinity

One of Vivekananda’s greatest contributions to the world of thought is his conception of the human being. To him a human is not just an *imago dei*, image of God, but God himself; a human is not simply the *axis mundi*, axis of the world, but the world itself; not the *brachys kosmos*, small world or microcosm, but the macrocosm too! The infinite is contained in the apparently finite; the eternal resides in the outwardly evanescent. Life pulsates in everything, from stones, plants, trees, and invisible beings to animals and humans; the difference is only in manifestation. A human is both individual and universal. Love and concern for oneself means love for all: ‘Man is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but the centre is located in one spot; and God is an

infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is everywhere. ... Man can become like God and acquire control over the whole universe if he multiplies infinitely his centre of self-consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

The belief that human beings inherit the guilt of Adam and are born in sin was overturned by the Vedantic teachings of Vivekananda, who explained that everyone is a manifestation of the supreme Self, which is by nature pure, eternal, and infinite. 'Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. ... You are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal, ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is not your servant, not you the servant of matter' (1.11). The view that humans are *amritsya putra*, children of immortality, is as old as the Upanishads. Vivekananda's teachings roused controversy among the theologians and scholars because the inherent human Divinity was contrary to the belief in original sin. But though a section of clergymen disapproved of Vivekananda's doctrine, many applauded him for this lofty view of humankind. The famous American thinker William Earnest Hocking (1873–1966), who attended the Parliament of Religions, was particularly struck by Vivekananda's observation: 'Call men sinners?—It is a SIN to call men sinners!'<sup>45</sup>

Apart from religious dogma, the nineteenth century was visibly hedonistic, excessively individualistic, and rooted in artificiality. Noticing this Vivekananda said: 'Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter; but underneath, it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface: really it is full of tragic intensity.'<sup>46</sup> Moreover, because of the spread of science, humankind was viewed as merely a biological organism, with no meaningful life or goal.

In such a situation Vivekananda's exalted view of human beings stirred a few to revise their opinion. Years later Bishop Masterman observed: 'We no longer believe in inherited guilt.'<sup>47</sup>

While a human being as spirit is infinite, as an embodied being he or she is finite. But the memory of that real nature subconsciously orients everyone to achieve perfection. As there are various grades and types of human minds, there are different paths to reach the goal of perfection. During his tours of the US and Europe, Vivekananda stressed that human beings are not pathetic weakling, born sinners, or freaks of nature, but sparks of Divinity. At Memphis he observed that nothing was baser than calling someone a sinner. He asserted the irrationality of a distant God, for our real nature, our immortal principle, is God. At Detroit he observed that those who regarded themselves as sinners were like lions masquerading as sheep. He spoke in a similar vein in Boston, New York, London, and other cities, emphasizing that an individual is not a creature of destiny but its creator: 'Never forget the glory of human nature. We are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which *I am*.'<sup>48</sup>

### **Religion Transcending Doctrines**

Another important contribution to the world of thought was Vivekananda's unique way of interpreting religion. An atheist is one who does not believe in God, and Vivekananda added: 'A man who does not believe in himself is an atheist. Not believing in the glory of our own soul is atheism' (2.294). The conscious breaking of religious or moral law is regarded as sin, but Vivekananda observed: 'If there is sin, this is the only sin—to say that you are weak, or others are weak' (2.308). Another important thing he did was to justify image worship by alluding to its

naturalness and prevalence among world religions in one form or another. He even pointed out its psychological use as an aid to concentration: 'By the law of association, the material image calls up the mental idea and *vice versa*' (1.16). According to Vivekananda, one does not move from error to truth but from lower truth to higher truth. He did not believe in the religion of a sacred 'Book' but in religious experience and regarded the prophets as waves on the boundless ocean of infinity, of which we all are: 'Books are useless to us until our own book opens. ... We are the living books and books are but the words we have spoken. Everything is the living God, the living Christ; see it as such. Read man, he is the living poem. We are the light that illumines all the Bibles and Christs and Buddhas that ever were' (7.89). Another of Vivekananda's sayings that have revolutionized religious thought is this: 'Religion is the realisation of Spirit as Spirit; not spirit as matter. Religion is a growth. Each one must experience it himself. ... With us doctrine has nothing whatever to do with salvation' (6.98).

Vivekananda's concept of religion transcends doctrines, dogmas, and pedagogy. His view that all religions are essentially one springs from the Rig Veda: '*Ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*; Truth is one, the sages speak of it differently.'<sup>49</sup> He believed that each religion has a distinct role to play as it meets the requirements of different mental capabilities. He held that religious unity must not be taken to mean the uniformity of religious ideas. Unity in variety is God's plan of the universe. Therefore, it is wrong to lay down fixed dogmas and try to force all people to adopt them. Vivekananda rightly argued that if there were not different religions, no one religion would survive. 'Why take a single instrument from the great religious orchestras of the earth? Let the grand symphony go on.'<sup>50</sup>

Vivekananda's views on religion had a seminal influence on a number of religious groups and societies, including Unitarians, Universalists, Christian Scientists, Congregationalists, later Transcendentalists, Neo-Christians, and the liberals among Roman Catholics. He was heard with rapt attention by bishops and clergymen, rabbis and rationalists, scientists and scholars. When he criticized Christians at the World's Parliament of Religions for sending out missionaries to save the souls of the starving people in India, Bishop John J Keane of Washington endorsed his views.<sup>51</sup> Reverend Reed Stuart, who had heard Vivekananda's lecture on 'The Divinity of Man' in Detroit on 17 February 1894, became so inspired that he preached a sermon entitled 'The Gate Opening towards the East' at the Unitarian Church on the following day (1.342). Likewise, Rabbi Grossman delivered a sermon entitled 'What Vivekananda Has Taught Us' in Detroit on 18 February 1894. 'We westerners, we have a God in the sky', he said, 'Kananda [*sic*] has a God on earth. ... Let us learn from the Hindu the lesson that God lives and reigns, now and ever, that God is in every flower of the field; in every breath of the air; in every throb of our blood' (1.347-8).

Vivekananda was aware that religious narrowness arouses intolerance, leading to emotive or subjective attachment to one's own faith and hostility towards others. In his maiden speech at the World's Parliament of Religions, Vivekananda said: 'I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.'<sup>52</sup> In his 'Paper on Hinduism', he described the future universal religion as one 'which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite

like the God it will preach' (1.19). And in his final speech, he advocated universal brotherhood saying 'each must assimilate the spirit of the others, and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own laws of growth' (1.24). He ended by saying: "Help and not Fight", "Assimilation and not Destruction", "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension" (ibid.).

The concept of a universal religion transcending the temporal or sectarian bonds and imbibing every attitude of the human mind—philosophical, emotional, mystical, and active—aroused great interest in the US and Europe, as evidenced by reports in contemporary newspapers. His idea of a universal religion may be said to have five essential features: (i) It should be rooted in spirituality and inculcate faith in one's innate Divinity; (ii) it should be based on principles, not persons; (iii) it should have a rational and scientific basis and allow scope for new thoughts; (iv) it should see God in human beings, and become a lever to uplift the downtrodden; and, (v) it should be non-sectarian and regard humankind as one. Vivekananda believed that the all-encompassing and non-sectarian Advaita Vedanta, which includes all these features, could be the religion of the future (8.348).

(To be concluded)

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52. *Complete Works*, 1.4.

(Continued from page 236)

Knowledge and my faith in my ability; an ability I have acquired over countless mornings reporting on time for training. I have been shooting for more than two-thirds of my life now. In all these years I have never been late for a training session—never. I wear that fact like a badge. I have never skimped on practice. I have never tried the short cut, mainly because I realized early in life that the short cut was only a way to fool myself.

Though I was not then fully familiar with Swamiji's teachings, I lived his words. I took up one idea totally, immersed myself completely in it, and left every other idea. Doing this gave me knowledge and strength. It gave me the ability to commit myself to rigorous discipline, to sacrifice the normal life I would have led as a teenager and as a young man. Letting one idea engulf me made me strive, made me unshakeable from the path, whether I won or lost. It gave me the raw resolve to keep going, because what I want is success.

I urge you all to seek the success that awaits you. Moreover, we have Swami Vivekananda's teachings to show us the way.



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# ***Eternal Words***

**Swami Adbhutananda**

**Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

**I**T IS DOUBTLESS VERY RARE for one to call upon God for the sake of love alone. The gopis had such an attitude.

## ***Selfless Love***

If one has intense love for God, the desire arises to throw away wealth, fame, infamy, and fear of public disgrace. These are all unreal—they are only the play of maya. Love is verily the primary thing.

It is extremely difficult indeed to serve sick patients throughout the year. One cannot even serve one's own parents without beginning to feel dejected. It will bring merit if one can serve with the right attitude.

It is very hard to develop affection for others. One cannot develop such affection without the grace of God. The affection of the worldly-minded is a showpiece; at every moment it is filled with selfishness. Can love ever grow within such people? Those with love in their hearts are blessed. Know that God's grace is given in plenty to those who love without expectations.

A person very much loves the objects of fancy. One becomes spiritual only when one loves God with the same intensity.

We love others due to the attraction of maya. Is it an easy matter to love? The avatars and the great souls know the true meaning of love. After realizing God, holy people engage themselves in removing the sufferings of humankind. The only thought in their minds is how to bring the

highest good to others. Where are those types of holy people now? The sadhu wears the garb of an ascetic, but where is his saintliness? Genuine sadhus are extremely rare.

You people talk too much about love. It is superficial. Love develops as a result of many spiritual practices. What capacity does a person have to love God? One only grows in love by his grace.

A person tries to fulfil selfish desires by hurting and harming others because one takes delight in the fulfilment of one's selfishness. The person who attains happiness without harming and hurting others attains true joy because the attitude is devoid of any selfishness. It requires the special grace of God to become like that. When one calls upon God, he will bestow his grace.

## ***Gratitude***

People forget the unsolicited help that others have freely given them. That is why there is so much misfortune. A true human being will remember such unrequested help. Such a person will always keep in mind the one who has helped him achieve success. It will bring misfortune if one forgets.

Only by honouring the one who has given help will a person achieve good fortune. Such a person is vouchsafed in the abode of God. But the person who does not show any such honour will surely suffer.

Should one forget the person who performs noble deeds?

At Almora when Swamiji was facing difficulty, one Muslim fakir fed him some fruit. Swamiji suddenly saw him again one day. He ran towards the man and pressed two rupees into his palm. I asked him: 'Why are you giving that man money?' Swamiji said: 'He fed me fruits when I was in trouble. Oh my dear Leto [Adbhutananda], why are you talking about two rupees? The help he gave me in my time of need is priceless.'

Swamiji went to see Ram Babu at Kankurgachhi when he was sick. In the presence of all, Swamiji placed Ram Babu's shoes in front of his feet. Ram Babu exclaimed: 'What are you doing Biley!' Swamiji said: 'Dear elder brother Ram! I am your same Biley now as I was before. Can I forget how much you have helped me?'

### **Ego**

When a person starts thinking 'I am such and such', 'I am a very important person', the ego wakes up. But the ego gradually leaves the person who discerns by thinking, 'There are many people who are more rich and powerful than I. I am quite ordinary. Whatever I am doing is surely accomplished by God's grace.'

No one in this world wants to be humble. Everyone wants to be great. That alone causes much confusion. All such confusion dissolves if one becomes a little humble. But that won't happen in the least. People ask, 'How am I any less than the others?' That is ego; there lies the root of all troubles. My dear, if you want peace in this world learn to be humble.

The Master used to say: 'A sadhu renounces everything; only the pride of thinking, 'I am a sadhu' does not leave him. If someone calls him inferior he gets angry, 'how am I inferior?' You people become restless with 'prestige! prestige!' What is honour or dishonour for a sadhu? Honour and dishonour are alike for a sadhu. Throw

away all of these conceited ideas.

All trouble comes as soon as one considers oneself to be great. Is there any more trouble for the one who considers oneself humble?

One experiences misery only due to the ego. Without God's grace, the ego doesn't leave.

### **The Glory of the Name**

The instructions that Sri Chaitanya gave were extremely straightforward. He said: 'Let everyone repeat the name of Hari.' The mind will be purified by repeating the name of Hari. Then one will understand what God is and see that the world is unreal.

In this Kali Yuga there is no trace of religious rituals, sacrifices, and austerities. God has not given that power to the people of the Kali Yuga. The only austerity in this Kali Yuga is to repeat the holy name of God; there is no other refuge or shelter. People fail to do this, that is why there is so much misfortune. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's words are the words of the scriptures. Can they be untrue? The disease of worldliness disappears if one repeats the name of Hari. By disobeying the words of the avatars people suffer greatly.

### **Enslavement**

It is better to live on alms than to take a job. One [a sadhu] who lives on alms need not go out on days on which he doesn't want to go. But people who have taken jobs have no such opportunity; they must go to work whether they like it or not. An independent profession is the best of all.

People in this world become the slaves of money. Although it requires no spending, no one wants to be the slave of God. Fortunate indeed is the one who enslaves oneself to God.

*(To be continued)*

# Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

NOW THE ARGUMENTS against the purported analysis of the term 'That' are being enumerated in the next two verses, which are in the *śṛṅgādhara* metre.

एवं विश्वस्य हेतुं प्रकृतिमभिदधुः केऽपि केचित्पराणू-  
नीशेनाधिष्ठितांस्तान् कतिचन कतिचिन्नश्चरं ज्ञानमेव ।  
अन्ये शून्यं विरिञ्चिं कतिचन समयं केऽपि केचिदुच्छां-  
कर्माऽन्ये ब्रह्म मायाशबलितमपरे सोऽपि तस्माद्विमृश्यः  
॥ १४ ॥

Similarly, the cause of this manifested universe (is considered to be different by various schools). Some (the Sankhyans) consider Prakriti to be the cause of this manifested universe. Some (the Vainashika Buddhists and the Jains) consider the group of atoms of the quartet of the basic elements (like earth) to be the cause of this universe. Some (of the schools of Yoga, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika) consider the cause to be Prakriti inspired by Ishvara and the group of atoms. Some others (the Vijñanavadi Buddhists) consider the cause to be momentary knowledge; some others (the Madhyamika Buddhists) consider the cause to be *śūnya*. The Lokayatas consider the cause to be the nature of the universe; some others consider Hiranyagarbha as the cause; some others consider time to be the cause; some consider spontaneity to be the cause. The Mimamsakas consider actions to be the cause, and the Vedantins consider Brahman conditioned by maya to be the cause of the universe. Therefore, (confronted with such varying explanations) the enquirer of Brahman has to contemplate on the cause of the universe.

Till now different opinions of the nature of the Atman were discussed. Now, different opinions regarding the nature of the cause of the manifested universe are being discussed. The earlier discussions were about 'thou' and now 'That' is being discussed. The followers of Sage Kapila, the believers of the Sankhya system of philosophy, consider Prakriti to be the cause of this manifested universe. Prakriti is the Pradhana formed out of the modification of the twenty-three principles, beginning with *mahat* and ending with the great elements, all in the state of equilibrium of the *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The Buddhists and the Jains believe that the quartet of elements like earth get caught in changes due to ignorance and take the external forms, like bodies, which are firmly imprinted on the mind.

According to the followers of Patanjali, the Yogins, and also the Naiyayikas and the Vaisheshikas, Prakriti is established on, or is inspired to work by, Ishvara. This Prakriti is the cause of the universe according to them. The Vijñanavadi Buddhists consider that the true nature of the Self is knowledge alone, and it is due to ignorance that this knowledge appears as external forms. Therefore, according to them, knowledge alone is the true characteristic of the Self, and the forms, like that of a pot, are all transitory and false. The Madhyamika Buddhists opine that even the transitory knowledge is unrelated to the

past and the future, and is unreal in the present too. *Shunya*, falsity, is the substratum on which the universe has been superimposed.

The Lokayatikas, also called Charvakas, are materialists who believe that this universe is caused out of its own inherent nature, just like a tree is produced from a seed. Just as fire has the capacity to produce heat, so does this universe have an inherent capacity to create or grow. The four great elements—earth, water, fire, and air—have inherent characteristics that are quite apparent, constant, and do not depend on the actions of any external agent. The Lokayata philosophy tries to explain nature or the universe in its own terms, without bringing in the principle of God, much like present-day science. The universe or nature has its own laws, and everything goes on according to these laws. This is not illusion or false, neither is it governed by nor based on any principle called God or Ishvara. This is the essence of the Lokayata philosophy. As a consequence, they do not believe in reincarnation or rebirth. There is an adage attributed to this philosophy: ‘*Yāvat jīvet sukham jīvet, ṛṇam kṛtvā ghytām pibet, bhasmibhūtasya dehasya punaragamanam kutah*; live happily as long as you live, drink ghee even by incurring debt, where is the coming back of the body, which turns into ashes?’ Therefore, according to this school of thought, the universe exists on its own basis.

There is another philosophy called Mauhurika. The Sanskrit word *mūhurta* means a moment. This philosophy is astrology and is based on the astronomical calculations of time. According to this school of thought, everything happens because of a particular time or a specific planetary position. Just as various seasons have different flowers and fruits, different times bring in different phases of the universe, and accordingly the universe is produced due to different

phases of time. There are some others, hardened atheists, who believe that this universe was created spontaneously and there is no alternative cause. They consider that this spontaneity is the irrefutable cause of the universe.

The Mimamsakas believe that the universe is created because of the different actions performed as prescribed in the Vedas. The prescriptions are of two types, injunctions and prohibitions. Some actions are to be performed and some have to be avoided. The adherence to these Vedic prescriptions causes a merit to be acquired, which is called *adṛṣṭa*. This merit is the cause of the creation of the universe according to Mimamsa. Now, we come to the opinion of the Vedantins, particularly the Advaita Vedantins. The Advaitins believe that this universe is created out of *maya*, which is inexplicable. The three *gunas* and the impressions created out of actions performed in conjunction with the all-powerful, inexplicable *maya* when in proximity to the Atman, which is of the nature of pure existence-consciousness-bliss absolute, create the universe. Due to this *maya* the Atman, which is identical with Brahman, appears as a person with body—having hair, hands, and other attributes. Just as the rope is the material cause of the illusion of the snake, similarly Brahman is both the material and efficient cause of this universe. However, this universe is caused by ignorance, or *maya*, which cannot be explained. This is the opinion of the Advaitins.

A spiritual aspirant who wants to know Brahman is faced with a serious problem. The Truth is spoken of variously by various people and the aspirant is likely to be confused. How does one get out of such confusion? By developing *viveka*, proper discernment, the spiritual aspirant can select between the Real and unreal, the pleasurable and the preferable, and determine the true path to be undertaken to realize Brahman.

(To be continued)

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## ***Saṁnyāsin in the Hindu Tradition: Changing Perspectives***

T S Rukmani

D K Printworld, 'Srikunj', F-52, Bali Nagar, New Delhi 110 015. Website: [www.dkprintworld.com](http://www.dkprintworld.com). 2011. viii + 283 pp. ₹ 900.

One of the enduring features of Hinduism is its ancient monastic tradition. The ashrama system assigns the sannyasin a unique place of honour, which continues to this day. Yet, as the author rightly observes, '*Saṁnyāsins* and the institution of *saṁnyāsa* are also subject to the phenomenon of change and this has been particularly pronounced in the age of globalization wherein *saṁnyāsins* are no more confined to the Indian landscape but are visibly present in foreign lands as well' (3). Hence, thirty-one sannyasins, out of fifty-five interviewed, are from organizations that exist in South Africa, UK, and North America. These organizations, naturally, develop their own adaptations of the original structure. As for the branches or schools of Hindu philosophy and religion covered, they are nearly comprehensive: Advaita, Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, Shaiva, Vaishnava, and those established by recent influential spiritual luminaries such as Sri Ramakrishna, followed by Swami Shivananda, Swami Chinmayananda, and others.

Anyone familiar with Professor Rukmani's work is sure to expect authenticity and thoroughness of detail as also fairness in formulating her approach to a subject. Of the initial two chapters the first deals with the culture of the Hindus vis-à-vis the sannyasins, and the second, of great interest, with scholars' works done in this area. Those who figure are well known: Sriyatsa Goswami, Gautam Patel, and Christopher Chapple. From these we know many things that

are generally slurred over. For instance, Professor Chapple tells the author about the perception of the Hindu sannyasins in the US. 'There is,' he says, 'this romanticization of the idea of *saṁnyāsa* and many Americans are looking for a parental replacement figure or looking to have an oriental experience of something exotic and romantic' (53). There are also enough people who have been involved with Eastern teachers. And much more interestingly, and somewhat disturbingly, Chapple observes that 'he found the whole notion of celibacy somewhat problematic because it is very difficult to find a truly pure example of this' (55).

Surprisingly, Narayandasji, head of Shankar Mandir, tells the author that the loss of respect for sannyasins is largely due to widespread deterioration in virtuousness among people as well as among some sannyasins bereft of the particular virtues that generate respect in them. There is also the suggestion that to cleanse the corrupt political field it may be necessary for sannyasins to get into politics. One must recall here, in contrast, Swami Vivekananda's stern injunction to keep away from politics. Of greater interest for me was the position and role of Hinduism as represented by the Ramakrishna Order in South Africa. While emphasizing brahmacharya and sadhana, Swami Saradananda (Saradaprabhananda) of the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa observes that the centre has a remarkable role in societal welfare: education, medicine, agriculture, in addition to finding a common ground between Hinduism and African traditional religions. Though isolationism needs to be tackled, it is very interesting that the centre has significant interactions with Roman Catholic institutions.

There is also the phenomenon that Pravrajika Vivekaprana of the Sarada Math, New Delhi, noted: 'The Westerner is more conscious of what the Hindu *saṁnyāsin* represents than the Indians

are. In India *saṁnyāsin* are taken for granted. But in the West the response is single-pointed and focussed and they connect with the spiritual work done by *saṁnyāsin*' (99). Indeed 'they expect the *saṁnyāsins* / *saṁnyāsinis* to give them ideas about personal evolution' (ibid.).

Considering the same issue, it is a pointer to the significance of the Hindu sannyasin's role abroad, as Swami Dayatmananda of the London Ramakrishna Centre points out, that 'whenever the government has problem concerning Hinduism, they write to us. They say: Write to Vedanta Centre, and whatever reply they give that would be the authority' (95).

Another important aspect of the sannyasin today is counselling. Swami Mahadevananda, an Italian by birth and a disciple of Swami Vishnu-devananda of the Divine Life Society, says that in his three decades of life as a monk he has observed that there are many motives attracting people to religion. There is certainly a hunger for spirituality but alongside there are also problems such as 'I am divorced from my wife', 'my child is taking drugs', and so on. The swami notes the fact that many centres of Sivananda Yoga Vedanta are headed by sannyasins.

This is again reflected in Swamini Pramananda, a disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. She did graduate studies in New York and was a musicologist for eight years in Brooklyn, with a Master's degree in that area—it is important to note that persons from various academic backgrounds take to sannyasa. Pramananda tells us that in her order 'the ritualistic aspect of *saṁnyāsa-dharma* is not emphasized when a woman is given *saṁnyāsa* in the *āśram*' (133). She is free to take up whatever ritual she would like to. For instance, the *shrad-dha*, funeral rites, are not performed as in other orders. Though the sannyasini is still a quaint figure with her ochre robes, she says that the whole situation changes when sannyasinis give *vidya*, knowledge. Pramananda also points out that, by and large, the cultural underpinnings do not interest the Westerner. This raises the important question whether one can really separate cultural bias from spirituality.

This brings us to the role of aspects other than realization of a spiritual goal for a sannyasin. For

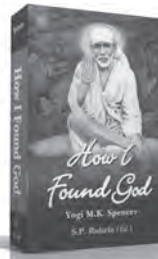
instance, the Harvard educated, Srivatsa Goswami of Radha Govinda Temple, Vrindaban, points out that 'there are no *saṁnyāsins* in that very strict sense of a *saṁnyāsin* these days. Neither is it possible to adhere to these rules. Today there are *saṁnyāsins* just doing social service, and it would be a misnomer to call them *saṁnyāsins*' (47). Though he concedes there are exceptions like the Ramakrishna Order, ISKCON, and Sivananda Ashram, he also points to a more perplexing fact: 'There are 15 to 16 banks in Vrindaban and each has huge assets to the tune of two crore of rupees, and many of them are personal accounts deposited by individual *saṁnyāsins*' (ibid.). While householders have not much wealth, 'a *saṁnyāsin* can write cheques worth 10–15 million rupees on one go' (ibid.).

I could give only glimpses of the vast insights one can garner from this fascinating study. To regard it as only a study of a religious phenomenon is to take the title of the book unilaterally. I am tempted to regard it as a multifaceted study conforming to an exploration of the four *purusharthas*, goals of life, as perceived and practised in their own way. It has the characteristic thoroughness and objectivity as well as interpretative subtlety one surely expects from the author.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

Former Head, Department of English, Osmania University

## BOOK RECEIVED



### How I Found God

Yogi M K Spencer

Ed. S P Ruhela

New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Phase-I, New Delhi 110 028. Website: [www.newagebooksindia.com](http://www.newagebooksindia.com). 2011. lxiii + 500 pp. ₹ 495.

This is the account of how an earnest seeker, Yogi M K Spencer (1888–1985), traversed his way towards God with the help of the spiritual training imparted initially by a great master of the Spirit World Rishi Ram Ram and then by Shirdi Sai Baba (1838–1918).

# REPORTS

## **Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda**

As announced in October 2012 the Ramakrishna Mission has taken up two types of 'Sustained Graded Value Education Programme' in commemoration of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary: Type A (Classroom-based) Programme: Under this programme, value education classes, based on prescribed books, are given to students in their schools twice a week. Type B (Non-formal) Programme: This programme is conducted in our centres or other institutions. It includes prayer, meditation, devotional singing, chanting of Swamiji's Swadesh Mantra, moral lessons, question-answer session, audio-visual session, yoga-sanas, and other activities. The latest progress report of the programmes is as follows. Type A: 2,539 units—a batch of 30 to 50 students is considered as one unit—have been undertaken, beyond the 2,000 units targeted, which benefited 112,577 students of 727 schools in 16 states. Type B: 402 have been undertaken, of the targeted 500 units, which benefited 17,006 students of 260 institutions in 14 states. In all, 1,131 teachers have been trained to conduct the programmes.

University Grants Commission, New Delhi, has instructed all the higher educational institutions in India (colleges, universities, and others) to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami

Vivekananda befittingly with various events throughout the year.

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, organized the inaugural function of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary celebration at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, on 12 January 2013. Sri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India; Smt Sonia Gandhi, UPA Chairperson; Sri A K Antony, Union Defence Minister; Smt Chandresh Kumari Katoch, Union Culture Minister, and Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, addressed the gathering. Commemorative coins of ₹ 5 and ₹ 150 denominations were released by Sri P Chidambaram, Union Finance Minister, and four commemorative postage stamps—one of ₹ 20 denomination and three of ₹ 5 denomination—were released by Sri Kapil Sibal, Union Communication Minister.



The House of Commons of the British Parliament passed the following motion on 28 January 2013 by the Early Motion 976, which was supported by twelve members: ‘That this House, on the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, recognises the valuable contribution made by him to interfaith dialogue at international level, encouraging and promoting harmony and understanding between religions through his renowned lectures and presentations at the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, followed by his lecture tours in the US, England, and mainland Europe; notes that these rectified and improved the understanding of the Hindu faith outside India and dwelt upon the universal goodness found within all religions; further notes that he inspired thousands to selflessly serve the distressed and those in need and promoted an egalitarian society free of all kinds of discrimination; and welcomes the celebrations of his 150th birth anniversary in the UK and throughout the world.’

Sri Pranab Mukherjee, president of India, inaugurated the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission’s celebration of Swamiji’s 150th birth anniversary at **Swami Vivekananda’s Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, Kolkata**, on 18 January. Sri M K Narayanan, governor of West Bengal; Sri Jawhar Sircar, CEO of Prasar Bharati; Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Swami Suhitananda addressed the gathering. About 400 people, including monks and distinguished guests, attended the function.

As a sequel to the above function, a daylong programme, highlighting the ‘Relevance and Significance of the Life

and Message and Work of Swami Vivekananda in the Present-day World’ was held at **Belur Math** on Sunday, 20 January. The first two sessions were presided over by Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj and Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj respectively. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the last session, in which Smt Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal, and Swami Suhitananda addressed the gathering. Nearly 15,000 people, including monks, nuns, delegates, and invitees, attended the programme.

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Bangalore**: Essay competitions on Swamiji in 83 high schools, in which 5,700 students took part. **Belgaum**: Devotees’ convention, public meeting, and cultural programmes on 13 January, attended by about 1,000 people. **Chandigarh**: Twenty value education programmes for 3,700 students and six value education workshops for 175 teachers in the months of October, November, and December 2012. **Chengalpattu**: Spiritual retreat at Kolathur on 25 December, attended by 115 people. Processions, devotional music, and film shows on Swamiji at Pazhavur, Kollathanallur, Mampattu, Vetrampakkam, Kendracheri, Andimadam, and Cheyyur on 22, 23, 29, and 30 December, and 5, 6 and 13 January 2013 respectively. A seven-foot

*President of India at Swami Vivekananda’s Ancestral House*



fibreglass statue of Swamiji was installed in the boys' school on 11 January. The 116th anniversary of Swamiji's visit to Chengalpattu was celebrated at Chengalpattu railway station on 12 January. **Chennai Mission Ashrama:** Tournaments in badminton, chess, cricket, football, and volleyball from 12 to 28 January, in which 995 students from 75 schools in Chennai participated. **Chittagong, Bangladesh:** Procession, public meeting, and cultural programme on 11 January; about 3,000 persons participated in the procession. **Coimbatore Mission:** A youth convention from 10 to 12 January, in which 1,023 youths of Tamil Nadu participated. **Delhi:** Public meeting and devotional singing on 11 January, attended by about 400 people. The five winners of the All India GenNext Leader Discovery Contest, conducted by the centre, were given prizes on 12 January. A musical mono-act performance on 13 January, attended by nearly 900 people. On 24 and 25 January, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), in association with Delhi centre, held a two-day programme comprising a workshop on value education, screening of a short film on Swamiji made by Delhi centre, and handing over the CBSE's Vivekananda School of Excellence Awards to 40 schools, including six schools of the Ramakrishna Mission affiliated to the CBSE. On the initiative of **Dhaka, Bangladesh,** centre a programme was held in collaboration with the governments of Bangladesh and India at the National Museum, Dhaka, on 12 January. Dr Dipu Moni, foreign affairs minister of Bangladesh, inaugurated the programme. Sri Pankaj Sharan, high commissioner of India to Bangladesh, and Swami Balabhadrananda addressed the meeting, which was presided over by Swami Ameyananda. About 1,400 people attended the event. On the initiative of **Florida, USA,** centre the island nation Trinidad and Tobago—one of the West Indies countries—celebrated Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary on a

grand scale from 10 to 17 January. Public meetings, exhibition, screening of a film on Swamiji, a play on Swamiji's life, and various service activities involving youths formed part of the programme. Swamiji's biography and complete works were distributed to many educational institutions and public libraries. People from all walks of life such as the president, the prime minister, political leaders, intellectuals, religious leaders, and social workers participated in these events. Swami Ishtananda participated as the chief guest of the main event held on 14 January. **Hyderabad:** The centre conducted Vivekananda Youth Leadership Award Event for high school and junior college students in November and December, in which about 300 students participated. A seminar for college students on the theme 'Relevance of Swamiji's Message to Solve the Problems of the Youth' on 15 December, attended by nearly 600 youths. A national youth festival from 7 to 12 January, in which about 1,200 students and teachers participated daily in processions, interactive sessions, and cultural programmes. **Jammu:** The centre held a seminar on the theme 'Unity in Diversity' on 8 and 9 January. Dr Karan Singh, Member of Parliament, delivered the keynote address in the inaugural session and Sri NN Vohra, governor of Jammu and Kashmir, spoke at the valedictory session. About 400 people attended the programme. A meeting at Jammu Sanskrit College on 12 January, attended by nearly 450 students and staff. **Jamshedpur:** Regional level youth convention on 19 and 20 January, in which about 3,000 youths from Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal participated. **Kalady:** Regional tribal conference from 28 December to 1 January, in which 877 delegates belonging to various tribal communities from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu participated. Sri Oomen Chandy, chief minister of Kerala, addressed the gathering on 29

December. A meeting on 21 January, attended by nearly 1,000 students and teachers. **Kanchipuram:** Speeches and cultural competitions in three schools on 5 and 13 December and 7 January, in which 1,300 students took part. **Kankurgachhi:** On 6 January Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated at Belur Math 'Shashwata Bharata', a mobile tableau with fibreglass statues of Swamiji, prepared by the centre. The tableau will journey throughout West Bengal to create awareness among the general public about the spiritual and cultural heritage of India. More details are available at <[www.shashwatabharata.in](http://www.shashwatabharata.in)>. The centre held a talk on Swamiji, followed by a sitar recital, on 12 January; about 800 people attended the programme. A spiritual retreat on 27 January, in which nearly 450 devotees took part. **Kanpur:** Speeches at 11 places in and around Kanpur in the month of January, attended by about 7,000 persons, including 6,000 students and 400 teachers. **Karimganj:** A devotees' conference on 1 January, in which about 1,000 devotees participated. A youth conference on 2 January, in which nearly 1,200 people, including students, teachers, and dignitaries, took part. **Lucknow:** A two-day state level conference on 'Unity in Diversity' on 12 and 13 January, addressed by Sri B L Joshi, governor of Uttar Pradesh, and several other distinguished speakers, and attended by about 1,000 people. **Madurai:** Essay competitions, in which 25,400 students from 294 institutions took part. **Mallankaranai:** A programme on 11 January, in which nearly 150 students of three colleges participated. **Mangalore:** A seven-day programme from 11 to 17 January, comprising a youth convention, attended by 1,100 youths; a procession of 9,000 youths; cultural programmes, attended by 800 people; a value education programme for teachers, attended by 500 teachers; a workshop for youths, attended by 750 youths; and a teachers'



*Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji inaugurating 'Shashwata Bharata'*

convention, attended by 480 teachers. **Nagpur:** Cultural competitions, in which 8,207 students from 100 schools of 48 villages took part. Prizes were given on 12 January. A symposium on 12 January. **Narottam Nagar:** A programme on 'Folk Art and Tribal Culture' on 27 January, attended by about 500 persons, mostly young students and local tribals. **Port Blair:** State level youth convention on 17 January at a local college, in which 750 university students participated. **Pune:** A residential youth camp on 24 and 25 December, attended by 40 boys from rural areas. Prizes were given on 12 January. Youth convention and inauguration of Swami Vivekananda Ratha Yatra on 12 January, attended by 1,500 people. Youth convention on 13 January, attended by nearly 1,500 boys and girls. On the same day a cycle rally was organized, in which around 100 youths participated. Cultural competitions, in which 1,100 students from 60 schools took part. **Puri Mission:** Cultural competitions from 6 to 8 January. Seminar on 'The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda in the Present Era' on 13 January. District level youth conventions in all the 30 districts of Odisha from September to January, in which nearly 14,000 students took part. State level youth convention on 27 January, in which about 1,000 delegates from various districts of Odisha took part; Swami Suhitananda presided over the meeting. **Raipur:**

Youth convention on 6 January, in which 300 students participated. Seminars on 12 and 13 January, in which Dr Raman Singh, chief minister of Chhattisgarh, and Sri Shekhar Dutta, governor of Chhattisgarh, participated. **Rajkot:** Residential zonal youth convention on 26 and 27 January, in which about 3,000 youths from Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan participated. A daylong classical music programme on 28 January, in which eminent musicians from different parts of India performed. Nearly 2,000 people attended the programme. **Ranchi Morabadi:** Spiritual retreat on 27 January, in which around 300 devotees took part. **Ranchi Sanatorium:** Football tournament for rural youths from 16 December to 13 January, in which 32 teams participated. **San Francisco, USA:** Workshop on raja yoga, talks on karma yoga, and reflections by students of different religious faiths on 26 January. **Seva Pratishthan:** Speeches, a cultural competition, and a music performance on 13 January. **Silchar:** Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj inaugurated a three-day celebration held from 12 to 14 January. Public meetings, seminar, tribal cultural programme, devotional music, drama, and film-show formed part of the celebration, which was attended by 6,000 people in all. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** The centre conducted 13 lectures, seminars, and public meetings at different places in and around Kolkata during December and January. Altogether 5,400 people attended the programmes. **Tiruvalla:** Speeches, devotional music, drama, and film-show on 8 September. Youth camp on 24 October. Public meetings on 23 November and 6, 11, and 13 January. Cultural meet on 10 January. **Thiruvananthapuram:** A youth camp at Nettayam sub-centre on 6 January. **Vadodara:** A state level essay competition on 'The Problems of Modern Youth and Swami Vivekananda', in which 995 students of 125 colleges in Gujarat participated. A laser show on

Swamiji in Vadodara and Ahmedabad on 2 and 6 January, attended by about 5,000 people in all. **Visakhapatnam:** A programme consisting of speeches, video-show, and dance-drama on 6 January, attended by 800 delegates.

### **National Youth Day Celebrations**

The National Youth Day, 12 January, was celebrated with great enthusiasm and in an impressive way by many of centres. **Chennai Math** organized competitions on the quotations of Swami Vivekananda, in which about ten lakh (one million) students from 3,000 educational institutions of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Pondicherry, and Tamil Nadu participated. In all, 15,000 students, the first three winners in each group, received the prizes.

The following centres and the Headquarters, along with Saradapitha, celebrated the day with various programmes such as processions, speeches, recitations, and cultural competitions: Aalo, Agartala, Allahabad, Asansol, Aurangabad, Baghbazar, Bangalore, Baranagar Mission, Belgaum, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Chapra, Chengalpattu, Coimbatore Math, Coimbatore Mission, Cooch Behar, Dehradun (Kishanpur), Delhi, Deoghar, Gadadhar Ashrama, Garbeta, Ghatshila, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jalpaiguri, Jayrambati, Kadapa, Kalady, Kanchipuram, Kanpur, Kochi, Limbdi, Madurai, Malda, Manasadwip, Mangalore, Midnapore, Mumbai, Muzaffarpur, Nagpur, Patna, Ponnampet, Port Blair, Pune, Puri Mission, Raipur, Rajkot, Ranchi Morabadi, Ranchi Sanatorium, Salem, Sargachhi, Sarisha, Seva Pratishthan, Shillong, Sikra-Kulingram, Silchar, Swamiji's Ancestral House, Tiruvalla, Thiruvananthapuram, Vadodara, Vijayawada, and Vrindaban.

### **New Mission Centre**

A branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission has

been started at **Mymensingh**, Bangladesh. The address of the centre is Ramakrishna Mission, 182 Ramakrishna Mission Road, Mymensingh 2200, Bangladesh; phone: +880 91-67086.

### **News from Branch Centres**

**Ramakrishna Math, Vadodara**, felicitated 50 gold medallists of Maharaja Sayajirao University on 23 December 2012.

Swami Gautamananda, Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, unveiled the newly installed life-size fibreglass statue of Swami Vivekananda at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram**, on 27 December.

**Ramakrishna Mission Boy's Home, Rahara**, celebrated its golden jubilee from 6 to 12 January 2013 with seminars, exhibitions, and cultural programmes. Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the celebration. Prof. Bratya Basu, Higher Education Minister, Government of West Bengal, several other dignitaries, and about 5,000 students, teachers, and guests participated.

Sri H R Bharadwaj, governor of Kerala and Karnataka, visited **Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady**, on 8 January 2013.

**Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre** did not have a direct access from Vivekananda Road. So, on the request of the Order, Kolkata Municipal Corporation acquired an adjacent five-katha (about 3,600 square feet) plot for the centre. Smt Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal, handed over the deed for the free lease of the plot for 999 years to Swami Suhitananda in a function held at the centre on 11 January.

On 11 January the Booksellers' and Publishers' Association of South India honoured the publication department of **Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, by presenting the department with a citation and a shield at the 36th Chennai Book Fair for its yeoman service as one of the

leading publishers in Tamil Nadu, especially for its publication of subsidized books of about one crore rupees on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

At the initiative of **Ramakrishna Mission, Kadapa**, a statue of Swami Vivekananda was installed at Shilparamam, a prominent cultural centre in Kadapa, on 12 January.

**Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor**, set a bookstall up at Swami Vivekananda Road Metro Station in Bangalore. It was inaugurated on 12 January.

On the occasion of the Gangasagar Mela, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadwip**, organized a camp at the Mela area from 12 to 16 January. In all, 1,014 pilgrims were provided with free board and lodging at the camp and the ashrama. Besides, free meals were served to about 200 non-resident pilgrims daily. Discourses and devotional singing were also arranged in the camp.

**Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata**, celebrated its 75th Foundation Day on 29 January. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj delivered the address of benediction, Swami Suhitananda addressed the gathering, and Sri M K Narayanan, governor of West Bengal, presided over the meeting.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Baranagar**, held the concluding phase of its centenary celebration in the month of January with a procession, public meetings, teachers' convention, youth convention, devotees' convention, exhibition, and cultural programmes. On 30 January Swami Suhitananda laid the foundation stone for the proposed centenary memorial building at the ashrama.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi**, organized five regional Kisan Melas (farmers' fairs) during January.

The UNESCO has created a UNESCO Chair in **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, in the area of Inclusive Adapted

Physical Education and Yoga, which is the first of its kind in this area in any higher education institution in Asia.

At the initiative of **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Dehradun**, the Mussourie Diversion Circle has been renamed Swami Vivekananda Circle and the Baorie Shiva Temple, where Swami Vivekananda stayed for some time with Swamis Turiyananda and Swami Akhandananda, has been declared a heritage centre by the government of Uttarakhand.

### Achievements


Master Mido Libang, a class-IX student of the school at **Ramakrishna Mission, Narottam Nagar**, stood first in Arunachal Pradesh in the National Talent Search Examination 2012, conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi.

### Relief

**Distress Relief** • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Belgharia**: 533 saris, 400 dhotis, 89 lungis, 400 chaddars, 212 shirts, 188 frocks, and 600 buckets; **Dinajpur**, Bangladesh: 155 T-shirts; **Guwahati**: 400 saris, 130 dhotis, and 40 vests; **Ichapur**: 89 saris, 30 adults' garments, 28 children's garments, and 5 bed-sheets; **Koalpara** (Jayrambati): 900 saris; **Kothar**: 310 saris and 310 dhotis; **Midnapore**: 131 saris and 30 dhotis; **Sarisha**: 75 kg rice, 8 kg dal, 145 children's garments, and 38 adults' garments; **Sikra-Kulingram**: 479 saris, 49 children's garments, 48 adults' garments, 4 umbrellas, 1400 notebooks, 120 nail-cutters, 120 soap bars, and 120 packets of biscuits; **Vrindaban**: 400 kg rice, 400 kg wheat flour, 100 kg dal, 100 kg mustard oil, 200 kg salt, 50 kg sugar, and 200 packets of biscuits.

**Fire Relief** • **Dinajpur**, Bangladesh, centre distributed 238 kg rice, 20 saris, 20 vests, 20 chaddars, 17 blankets, an equal number of jugs, plates, and tumblers, and 34 soap bars among 17 families whose houses had been gutted by a devastating fire in Ghidob village of Thakurgaon district.

**Hailstorm Relief** • The town of Ladysmith, Kwazulu-Natal, in South Africa was hit by a devastating hailstorm on 9 December 2012. Many families were displaced and their belongings damaged. **Durban** centre immediately commenced relief work through its Ladysmith branch centre. Daily assistance is continuing through distribution of cooked meals and food parcels to 200 families. Window panes and sheets of tarpaulin, plastic, and tin are being supplied to needy families for repairing their houses. Besides, 500 sets of clothing and shoes have been provided to the victims.

**Winter Relief** • From November 2012 to January 2013 14,028 blankets were distributed to needy people through the following centres. **Agartala**: 250; **Antpur**: 500; **Barasat**: 250; **Belgharia**: 422; **Bhubaneswar**: 250; **Chandigarh**: 255; **Chapra**: 1,200; **Cherrapunjee**: 2,227; **Contai**: 200; **Cooch Behar**: 387; **Gadadhar Ashrama**: 100; **Ghatshila**: 250; **Gol Park**: 400; **Jaipur**: 250; **Jammu**: 304; **Kankurgachhi**: 250; **Karimganj**: 300; **Khetri**: 188; **Koalpara** (Jayrambati): 500; **Kothar**: 310; **Lucknow**: 100; **Midnapore**: 500; **Muzaffarpur**: 250; **Ooty**: 250; **Puri Mission**: 250; **Saradapitha**: 500; **Sargachhi**: 135; **Sarisha**: 400; **Sikra-Kulingram**: 2,100; **Srinagar**: 250; **Swamiji's House**: 250; **Taki**: 250. In Bangladesh 1,327 blankets were distributed in January to the needy through the following centres. **Chittagong**: 450; **Dinajpur**: 877. During the same period the following centres distributed winter clothing to the needy: **Antpur**: 250 jackets; **Ichapur**: 150 jackets; **Kothar**: 65 jackets; **Lucknow**: 1,100 sweaters; **Patna**: 116 woollen sweaters, 27 coats, and 10 pants; **Sargachhi**: 55 jackets; **Sikra-Kulingram**: 72 winter garments and 150 jackets; **Chittagong**, Bangladesh: 200 warm garments for children. 

**Corrections** • January 2013, p. 43: read 'Prof Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee was' for 'Prof Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee is'—he is also a former Professor of Statistics, Calcutta University. January 2013, p. 47: read 'appearance of finer to grosser entities' for 'appearance of finer entities'.



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